Motor Racing Australian Grand Prix

Driver pact hands Finn unreal victory

Alan Henry at Albert Park

DAVID Coulthard began the new season as he finished the old, playing second fiddle to his McLaren-Mercedes team-mate Mika Hakkinen. In last year's final round at Jerez, Coulthard was instructed to let Hakkinen back ahead of him in the closing stages of the race; last Sunday he did it of his own volition.

By sticking to the terms of their pre-race agreement the Scot certainly earned the admiration of the Formula One paddock, but enraged the race organisers, who lodged a formal complaint with the sport's governing body, the FIA. "It's not the right of team owners to decide who's going to win," said Australian Grand Prix Corporation chairman Ron Walker.

However, the FIA responded quickly on Monday, stating that the McLaren team would not receive any sanction.

The McLaren pair agreed that whoever reached the first corner of the race in the lead would take the win, assuming they had a clear run at the front without having to fend off outside opposition. Although Coulthard had qualified second behind Hakkinen, he believed his track record of brilliant getaways stacked the odds in his favour.

"Mika and I have learned a lot over the winter," Coulthard said afterwards. "We are an awful lot closer and we agreed that whoever got to the first corner first, we would not challenge each other. I think that this was very sensible under the circumstances as we had not done a full race distance prior to the race.

"I was very confident that I would beat Mika to the first corner but he made the best start. I think he deserved to win the race, no question about it. I could think about it clearly and did what I thought was the right thing to do."

Hakkinen dominated the first half of the race, but lost the lead when a mix-up in the pits caused him to be called in prematurely for his second refuelling stop with 22 of the 58 laps left. He was waved straight through the pitlane, returned to refuel two laps later and resumed 33 seconds behind Coulthard.

The Scot made his second stop on lap 42 but kept the lead from Hakkinen, now 13.5 seconds back. The Finn then produced a stunning demonstration of driving, rattling off a sequence of quick laps to catch Coulthard until, with two laps to go, the Scot pulled over on the start-finish straight.

"What David did today was remarkable," said Hakkinen after the race. "I have been in Formula One for many years and seen a great deal. What he did today was really gentlemanly, unreal and fantastic."

It was, however, questionable whether Coulthard should have been expected to abide by his agreement under these circumstances. Hakkinen's delay may have been the team's fault but it was part of the natural ebb and flow of motor racing; correcting such a misfortune for the second successive race made Coulthard appear over-anxious to please and devalued Hakkinen's victory.

It was not the first time McLaren drivers had struck such a deal. In the 1988 Australian Grand Prix at Adelaide, Ayrton Senna did not attempt to race his team-mate Alain Prost after clinching the world championship in the previous race. Three years later, the Brazilian conceded the lead of the Japanese Grand Prix to Gerhard Berger on the final corner as a gesture of thanks to the Austrian for his support throughout the season.

The fact that the two McLarens lapped the entire field last Sunday in a crushing demonstration of their technical superiority was hardly a surprise. Pre-season testing had indicated they would be the cars to beat, but as neither driver had completed a full race distance during those tests, their prospects were tinged with a degree of caution.

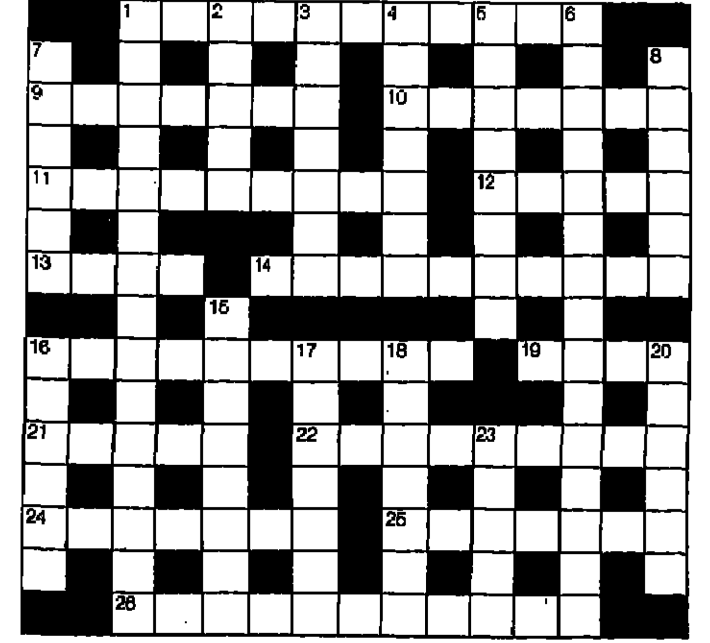
In the event, the team's domination was down to much more than simply their switch to Bridgestone tyres this season. The McLaren-Mercedes were established as the fastest cars in the field by the end of the last campaign and Melbourne was not a circuit on which Bridgestone tyres were expected to offer a significant performance advantage. The reality was that McLaren had got every variable — engine, chassis, tyres and aerodynamics — tuned to perfection and nobody else could get close.

Among the wreckage of the opposition was Michael Schumacher's Ferrari, which qualified immediately behind the McLarens, then ran a strong third in the opening stages before the engine failed spectacularly after five laps. The Williams of Jacques Villeneuve finished fifth.



Team effort . . . Mika Hakkinen leads David Coulthard at the finish in Melbourne PHOTO: MIKE COOPER

Cryptic crossword by Gordius



Across

1 Pudding to suit lovers (11)
9 Instrument backed rival over eastern church leader (7)
10 With poor coal, fire doesn't begin to give heat (7)
11 Dress for graduate taking part in degree ceremony, for example (9)
12 French writer about English fellow (5)
13 Making love with model at the office? (4)
14 Office equipment still sound (10)
16 Staple crop for distribution (6,4)
19 Repeated order for judgment (4)
21 River water recedes — the origin of many a tale (5)
22 Without a union there's no possibility of striking (9)
24 What's written by the French is inept (7)
25 State of fashionable goddess (7)
26 Where treatment may be rough in men's organisation? (7,4)

Down

1 Undignified language by media after sex charge involving primate (5,10)
2 Higgins' protégée — one with zeal for reform (5)
3 Muster possibly a carriage and pair (7)
4 Property failing to state causing some escape of warmth (7)
5 £1 is within the realm of belief (8)
6 Tolerate, oddly enough (7,2,6)
7 When old they may become settled (6)
8 Guard the south door . . . (6)
15 . . . Nigel put off Members from entering (8)
16 Set square gained assent (6)
17 Classical City ostentation — at Leytonstone? (7)
18 Duck when in danger of being shot? (7)
20 Disaster fell on motorway (6)
23 Dry regimen in the house, with only water (5)

Last week's solution

A	■	A	■	I	■	I	■	T	■	L	■	F	■	I
L	A	S	T	M	O	N	T	H	■	A	G	A	I	N
A	■	U	■	E	■	T	■	O	■	B	■	N	■	C
D	O	N	O	T	G	O	■	M	A	E	S	T	R	O
Y	■	C	■	■	■	T	■	A	■	L	■	O	■	M
I	R	I	S	■	W	H	I	S	T	L	E	D	U	P
N	■	O	■	■	■	A	■	■	■	E	■	■	■	A
T	I	N	Y	B	I	T	■	M	I	D	L	E	N	T
H	■	■	■	L	■	■	■	I	■	■	■	S	■	I
E	G	G	C	A	P	S	U	L	E	■	S	T	A	B
M	■	E	■	B	■	L	■	K	■	■	■	R	■	I
E	N	N	O	B	L	E	■	W	A	G	T	A	I	L
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D	Y	L	A	N	■	G	O	O	D	N	I	G	H	T
S	■	E	■	G	■	E	■	D	■	G	■	E	■	Y

Boxing

Tyson sues King for $100m

John Rawling

ANY notion that the split between Mike Tyson and Don King is merely a tiff vanished with the news last week that the former world heavyweight champion has sued the self-styled "World's Greatest Promoter" for more than $100 million.

Tyson filed a suit in the US District Court of Manhattan alleging King has been cheating him out of ring earnings since 1988, when King began promoting Tyson fights. He has also applied to the court, a federal body, to release him from the contracts he signed with King in 1994 while in prison for rape.

The suit, against King and his company Don King Productions, states: "From the start, King and DKP betrayed the trust and confidence Tyson placed in them. Once King and DKP controlled every facet of Tyson's monies, purses, accounts, books and records, they wrongfully took money from Tyson for their own benefit."

The suit claims improper deductions were made "year after year", including from 1992 to 1995 when Tyson was in jail, when it is alleged King coerced Tyson into signing contracts without providing independent advice.

The contracts included an exclusive deal for the broadcast of Tyson fights on the Showtime pay-per-view cable channel and a six-fight deal with the huge MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas to stage the contests. The suit says King and his company wrongfully took $45 million in purse money from the Showtime deal alone.

Tyson is banned from boxing until July at the earliest, for biting Evander Holyfield, but will earn around $3.3 million for his part in a World Wrestling Federation event on March 29.

The 67-year-old King has deeper problems. Embroiled in legal actions with British promoter Frank Warren and Tyson's former manager Bill Cayton, he faces a possible jail term if he is found guilty of an alleged insurance swindle against Lloyd's of London in a retrial that starts this month in New York.

King was in Mexico City last weekend promoting a fight between Julio Cesar Chavez and Miguel Angel Gonzalez for the vacant World Boxing Council light-welterweight title. The fight ended in a controversial draw — after 12 rounds the judges scored it 115-114 for Chavez, 116-114 for Gonzalez and 115-115, causing many in a crowd of 50,000, most of them pro-Chavez, to jeer and toss debris into the ring.

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The Washington Post · Le Monde



A Palestinian policeman and a protester in Bethlehem during riots against Israeli killings PHOTO: YOAV LEMMER

Israel resists EU role in peace moves

Ian Black in Amman and Julian Borger

ROBIN COOK, the British Foreign Secretary, was expected to go ahead with a controversial visit to a Jewish settlement on occupied Palestinian territory near Jerusalem on Tuesday, after accepting terms laid down by an angry Israeli government.

Israel's anger at Mr Cook's visit to the East Jerusalem settlement of Har Homa reflects its instinctive opposition to a role for Britain and its European partners in the difficult business of making peace between Arabs and Jews.

"We are determined that we will be part of the peace process," said Mr Cook, who is representing the European Union as well as Britain.

Only last week Tony Blair and his Israeli counterpart, Binyamin Netanyahu, had held a friendly meeting, despite Mr Netanyahu's repeated insistence that former European colonial powers "understood nothing" about the Middle East.

British officials said that Mr Netanyahu had been strikingly concerned to improve relations with the EU and had simply been playing to a rightwing gallery by raising the stakes so publicly over the visit to the settlement.

Mr Cook's trip was twice postponed in the autumn, annoying Arabs who accused Britain of double standards for talking tough about Saddam Hussein but not paying enough attention to the crisis in the Middle East peace process. Arab states and Palestinians also hoped that the EU, already bankrolling the 1993 Oslo peace accords, would take a more prominent role and act as a counterweight to the United States, which is seen as favouring Israel.

Once Britain assumed the EU's rotating presidency in January it was just a question of dates. Mr Cook's busy schedule meant that to avoid snubbing anyone he had to cram six countries into three days.

International objections to Har Homa are not new: the start of preparatory work at the settlement last March was a blow to the peace process, just weeks after Israel finally redeployed troops from the West Bank town of Hebron.

Meanwhile on Monday Jibril Rajoub, the Palestinian security chief in the West Bank, said he was suspending security co-operation with Israeli troops in Hebron after days of clashes.

Protests across the West Bank were ignited last week after Israeli soldiers shot dead three Palestinian workers at a checkpoint.

Mr Netanyahu described the shootings as a "tragic mistake", but Palestinian fury was exacerbated by news that three soldiers arrested for their involvement were later released, despite eyewitness accounts suggesting they had opened fire in panic at a Palestinian minibus taxi, under the false impression it was part of a terrorist attack.

● Mordechai Vanunu, the former technician who blew the whistle on Israel's nuclear programme, walked out of solitary confinement last week and mingled with fellow prisoners for the first time in 12 years after Israel's justice ministry ruled that he was in danger of losing his mind.

Cook fudge, page 6

Vatican disappoints Jews

John Hooper in Rome

SENIOR Jewish figures reacted to the Vatican's long-awaited statement on the Nazi Holocaust on Monday with either cautious misgiving or outright dismay.

In a brief 10-page document the Vatican expresses regret and "deep sorrow" for the actions of some Roman Catholics during the second world war. But while claiming it is an "act of repentance", it does not include any apology for Church leaders who failed to speak out against Hitler.

Long passages of the text smack of self-justification and it mounts a spirited defence of Pius XII, whose wartime silence has long been the subject of controversy.

Israel's chief rabbi, Meir Lau, said he had expected an unequivocal apology from the Vatican for Pius XII's "shameful attitude". Rabbi Lau, a Holocaust survivor, said: "There is no doubt that a clear condemnation from the Vatican at the time could have prevented the terrible things that were done."

Pius XII's defenders have argued he opted for "quiet diplomacy" so as not to endanger Catholics in Nazi-occupied Europe. Monday's statement recalls that in 1939 the then pontiff warned against theories which denied the unity of the human race. It adds that the "wisdom of Pope Pius's diplomacy" has been acknowledged by numerous Jewish groups.

Entitled We Remember: A Reflection On The Shoah, the document took more than 10 years to produce.

Its preparation has been followed closely by Pope John Paul II, who wrote a preface for it in the form of a letter to its main author, the Australian cardinal Edward Cassidy.

French left takes rightwing bastions

Paul Webster in Paris

LIONEL JOSPIN'S Socialist-led government won a resounding vote of confidence in elections for the 22 French regions last weekend, with the conservative Gaullist-centrist coalition polling one of its worst scores countrywide.

Although more than a third of the 38 million voters abstained, several rightwing bastions fell to leftwing parties. The biggest shock was in the Ile de France, centred on Paris, where the left finished ahead of a rightwing coalition led by the Gaullist former prime minister Edouard Balladur.

The governing coalition of Socialists, Communists and Greens won a stamp of approval for their first nine months in power, gaining the upper hand in 12 of the country's 22 regions against a mere two in the last regional ballot in 1992.

Other leftwing victories included Provence-Cote d'Azur; Aquitaine; Languedoc-Roussillon; Picardy in the north; and Britanny.

The left easily held on to rural Limousin and the industrial Nord-Pas-de-Calais, the two regions it won six years ago.

The results showed government parties with more than 41 per cent of the vote and the opposition Gaullist RPR, with their UDF partners, with 35.6 per cent. The centre-right alliance retained a partial majority in just six regions and an absolute majority in one.

The extreme-right National Front did well, scoring an average 15 per cent. Its councillors will hold the balance of power in several regions when members vote for their local chairmen this week.

The most significant result was the poor showing of the opposition parties, which were in government until they were routed by the leftwing coalition in the June general elections.

Mid-term elections usually favour the opposition, but the polling confirmed Mr Jospin's personal popularity, and electoral approval for reforms such as the 35-hour working week and a $8 billion job creation programme.

The elections also confirmed the growing impact of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front, which will have the deciding votes in selecting a chairman for the Paris region and Provence-Cote d'Azur, where it took about a quarter of the votes and finished ahead of the orthodox right.

Mr Le Pen's group is now the biggest single party in the Marseille region, where it has consolidated its power base.

The Front's leader said that his party would back the RPR and UDF if they accepted six demands, including a pledge not to raise taxes and to defend French cultural identity.

"This [offer] is aimed at all those who want to save their regions from six years of socio-communism," Mr Le Pen said. The demands made no mention of the Front's nationalist policies, which include expelling immigrants.

While the Front lost a seat in Paris, it took 37 in Marseille — the same number as the RPR and UDF combined and 11 more than the Socialists without their coalition partners.

In three of the six *départements* or counties that make up the eastern Mediterranean region, the Front took more than a quarter of the votes. But the biggest humiliation for the orthodox right was in the Var around Toulon, where Philippe Léotard, the former defence minister who leads the UDF, was beaten into third place. The Front scored 28 per cent, one point less than the combined left.

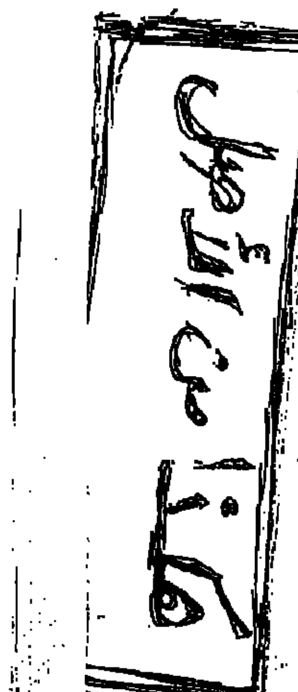
Like the Gaullists, Mr Léotard's movement was told to refuse alliances with Mr Le Pen's extremists. The UDF leader has now come under pressure to amalgamate with the RPR.

Le Monde, page 21

Seats

	1998	1992
Socialists	396	318
RPR	285	318
N F	275	239
UDF	262	305
Communists	147	115
Greens	68	106

Austria	AS30	Malta	60c
Belgium	BF80	Netherlands	G 5
Denmark	DK17	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 14	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 500	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,500	Switzerland	SF 3.80



West must do more than just warn Milosevic

THE British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, has warned the Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic, that he faces harsher economic sanctions if the killings in Kosovo do not stop (West gets tough with Milosevic, March 15). Mr Milosevic couldn't care less. He knows Britain won't lift a finger to aid innocent people being killed in Kosovo because Britain, despite "stern warnings", didn't manage to deter or prevent *any* violence, mass murder or appropriation of land by the Serbs in the recent obscene war in Bosnia.

Recently, I visited friends in Bosnia-Herzegovina. They made me all too aware that the majority of Bosnians feel that Britain's inactivity during that war amounted to a tacit approval of Serbian aggression.

Mr Cook is quite right to contribute $2 million towards the exhumation of the murdered dead from mass graves in Bosnia. But for the mass preservation of the living in Kosovo what is desperately needed are not words but action.
Simon McBurney,
London

YOUR call for the restoration of Kosovo's autonomous status comes too late (Kosovo needs autonomy, March 15). The unconstitutional revocation of autonomy by Belgrade in 1989 has been treated internationally as Serbia's internal affair, despite a system of ethnic apartheid unimaginable elsewhere in Europe.

The Albanian majority has been encouraged to remain passive in the desperate hope that international diplomacy would prevail, with the result that a whole generation of young people has grown to adulthood while being denied access to its own educational institutions and medical facilities — solely because of ethnicity. They are angry and disillusioned. It is surprising that the Kosovo Liberation Army only became active as late as 1996.
Alex Standish,
London

THE fact that Slobodan Milosevic is acting now, rather than later, bears witness to the growing force of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). For the past two years, arms and money have been secretly pouring into the KLA, principally from supporters in Switzerland, on the understanding that Kosovo will not be allowed to become another Bosnia (where an embargo was placed on the effective arming of Bosnian Muslims).

Serbian paramilitaries, and now regular units of the Serbian army under direct instructions from Mr Milosevic, will be met by an indigenous force. The international community should not attempt to tie its hands.
(Dr) Leonard Stone,
London

Ties that bind no longer

LIKE many Australians who lived through the war and who read Alexander Frater's review of Christopher Somerville's book (Imperial Britain's last call to arms, March 1), the surprise for me was that the British needed to be reminded of the contribution to Britain's survival made by Anzac and Canadian forces in 1939-45.

How enthusiastic we were for things British then, even if on meeting them many of the actual British seemed to fall short of our expectations. In the halcyon days of "our" empire, only a small minority of us felt anything but a profound loyalty towards the common crown and an easy confidence in the excellence of British institutions. We were genuinely concerned about Britain's fate, for it seemed that upon it depended our own. The imperial sentiment remained strong into the fifties and might have remained so.

It was the "little Englanders" of 1974 who ultimately destroyed the links. It has taken a lot of time and tens of thousands of disillusioning visits to Britain by old loyalists for the consequences to finally sink in. The Britain that the Commonwealth had fought for had ceased to be, and in the meantime we found ourselves also to have changed. And so I will give my allegiance to the Australian republic when it comes.
D C Lewis,
Brisbane, Australia

MARTIN Walker's excellent overview of Australia's constitutional debate (Royal splits in the Lucky Country, March 8) omitted reference to one important influential factor, namely the strength of sentiment of the millions of Australians of Irish Catholic stock.

It was not until the first prime minister with these ethnic roots, Paul Keating, came to power that some sensitive issues were addressed. For example, it was he who ended the requirement that those taking Australian citizenship swear an oath of allegiance to the Queen, which enabled many thousands of Catholics to become Australian citizens without having to "bend a Catholic knee to a Protestant Queen".

So to constitutional reform. The good and the great who represented Australians at the Constitutional Convention referred to the Queen with prudence but nevertheless came to the conclusion that nothing less than a republic would do.

But just as the word "republic" brings a shine to the eyes of some, to many others it is a red rag to a bull. Implicit in the move to a republic is the abolition of the Westminster system of government. Australians of Irish Catholic stock have the constitution of Eire and its recent successes to draw on and perhaps do not share a feeling of reverence for the "Westminster system" with conservative Australians.

In combining the issue of the head of state with the issue of displacing the Westminster system, Australians have been ill served. Constitutional reform should be addressed in two steps. First the approval of the electorate should be sought to transfer to Australians the constitutional powers now vested in the Queen. Then, after the dust has settled, a less rushed debate could ensue concerning the redistribution of political power within the existing structure. But by conflating two distinct issues, a successful outcome is far from predictable.
Tony Lee,
Coolum Beach, Queensland,
Australia

IN HIS report on Australia's recent constitutional convention, Martin Walker misses the point. While the delegates to the convention wasted time on what kind of republic we should have, the basic issues remain unresolved. These are aboriginal land rights and coming to terms with our colonial past.
John Hooker,
Killarney, Victoria, Australia

Epidemic of misinformation

THE coverage of anthrax (Inside Saddam's deadly biological armoury, February 22) in both the United States and British press has been full of misinformation (the New York Times referred to it as a "virus"). A basic microbiology text would suffice to dispel much of the nonsense being peddled in support of Bill and Tony's great imperial adventure.

Bacillus anthracis cause a deadly disease, anthrax, in herbivores. Humans are relatively resistant. Cutaneous anthrax, the most common form in humans, is due to direct inoculation into the skin and is rarely fatal. The frightening pulmonary anthrax is fatal. Veterinary workers are routinely vaccinated against it.

The causative agent of *Clostridium perfringens*, gas gangrene, cited as part of Iraq's deadly arsenal, is commonly found in the bowels of most heads of state and even that of some foreign secretaries.

Aflatoxin, produced by a common fungus, is more a problem on peanuts than Iraqi pistachios.

Of the pathogens depicted in the article, only rotovirus poses a significant threat to world health. Rotovirus is a leading agent in infant diarrhoea — the primary cause of child mortality in impoverished places, such as Iraq (where seven years of punitive embargo has deprived the most vulnerable of access to safe water and medical care). If a generation of Iraqi children succumb to the disgusting infectious diseases of deprivation, it will be in large part the result of the campaign of biological warfare conducted against them by the callous leaders of this US-British alliance.
(Dr) Robin Eastman-Abaya,
Binghampton, New York, USA

The profits of doom

IT MUST be tremendous fun to write an article about the year 2000 computer problem (A problem that has passed its sell-by date, February 15). There is, after all, an overabundance of doom merchants happy to pep up the story. Never mind the fact that most of these "experts" are either affiliated with year 2000 solution providers or, alternatively, network managers trying to justify spending millions on the solution.

But, for the record, by the standards of the networking industry this is a childishly simple problem. The irony of this situation is that come the millennium, as the clock strikes midnight and the predicted network doomsday fails to transpire, we will no doubt see the same year 2000 service providers that blew the whole thing out of proportion claiming credit for its resolution.
Stephen Saunders,
New York, USA

Erratum: The Recruiter Research and further information for MBA applicants is available at: www.topmba.com

Briefly

I BEG to disagree with Hugo Young's description of Helmut Kohl as a "European statesman" (March 1). I would call Konrad Adenauer a (European) statesman, but Mr Kohl — his self-proclaimed "grandson" — isn't fit to wear his shoes. A statesman is interested in Europe for Europe's sake. Mr Kohl is certainly interested in Europe, but for his own sake. However, creating a united Europe, and if that is not possible at least pushing through the euro (thus at least achieving monetary union), would make him superior not only to Adenauer but even to Bismarck.
W Vins,
Alfter, Germany

TEXANS, and by extension all Americans, are divided on the merits of executing Karla Faye Tucker, a pickaxe murderer (February 15). They do not appear divided to the same extent, however, on a bombing campaign against Iraq that might result in several thousand innocent civilian casualties. Where are the famous self-declared compassionate humanitarian values of the American people?
Otto Brody,
Regina, Canada

CAN Andrew Neil really think that Rupert Murdoch is "diminished" and "tarnished" by the HarperCollins/Chris Patten business (March 8)? In view of Mr Murdoch's massive, malign influence on journalistic integrity and standards of public debate (particularly here, where he owns around 70 per cent of the newspapers), this seems a bit like condemning Saddam Hussein for his poor dress sense.
John Hayward,
Wegena, Tasmania, Australia

PRESIDENT Jacques Chirac describes the killing of the prefect of Corsica, Claude Erignac, as "a barbaric act of extreme gravity" (February 22). Is he simply referring to Sir Isaac Newton or is this not the same man who sanctioned the destruction of large swaths of the South Pacific with six huge atom bomb blasts? An act of extreme depravity by any standards. Which is the greater evil, I wonder?
Peter Rossi,
Pécs, Hungary

WHAT is the name of the subdivision of the euro? On French television recently, there was a reference to "Deux euros et 50 centimes" for 2.50 euros. Does this mean that in the UK it will be "Two euros and 50 pennies", in Germany "Zwei Euro und 50 Pfennige", etc?
Margaret Webb,
Nyons, France

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Danish PM's poll victory stuns pundits

Stephen Bates in Copenhagen

DENMARK'S Social Democrat prime minister, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, confounded predictions of his imminent political demise last week by winning the general election by the narrowest margin.

His coalition of left and centre-left parties retained control of the 179-seat Folketing (parliament) with 90 seats, a majority of one over the opposition conservative parties, which had been widely predicted to form a coalition government.

Newspapers in Copenhagen reflected the shock at the result, with headlines proclaiming "It's a Miracle!" above photographs of a clearly bemused but elated prime minister.

Many ministers had cleared their desks, convinced they were about to be thrown out of office. Opinion pollsters, as in Britain after John Major's unexpected victory in 1992, struggled to explain why they had predicted the wrong result.

The result sent a wave of relief through the European Union, which had anxiously awaited the outcome to gain clues to the likely result of Denmark's referendum in May on whether to accept the Amsterdam treaty.

Mr Rasmussen said: "The most important task of all is now to secure a 'yes' in the referendum."

All 15 EU member states must ratify the treaty before it can come into effect. The Danes rejected the Maastricht treaty in 1992 before being persuaded to accept a revised version in a referendum the following year.

With the government and the leader of the rightwing opposition, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, strongly backing a yes vote, polls show 48 per cent in favour and 32 per cent against.

Mr Rasmussen depends on the votes of two representatives from the semi-independent Faroe Islands and Greenland. Joannes Eidesgaard from the Faroes said that although he would not vote to bring the administration down, he would not back it on all issues.

"Watch out for more government money for the Faroes — at least a new airport or sports stadium," observed one Copenhagen journalist.

The election's losers were Mr Ellemann-Jensen and his conservative coalition, which lost votes to the racist fringe parties of the far right.

A man carries a sack of mussels across a river in Jakarta, as Indonesia faces continuing food shortages. The embattled President Suharto looked obdurately opposed to meeting calls for reform as he appointed a cabinet of close allies last weekend. ***Comment, page 14; Washington Post, page 17*** PHOTO: DYLAN MARTINEZ

Hindu leader gets the call

Suzanne Goldenberg in New Delhi

THE Hindu nationalist leader, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, last weekend received the call he had agonised over for five days: an invitation from India's president, K R Narayanan, to form the next government.

India's first Hindu national government, a coalition of more than a dozen regional parties and several independent MPs led by the Bharatiya Janata party, was expected to be sworn in this week. Mr Vajpayee's alliance — still a few seats short of a majority — will face a confidence vote within 10 days of being sworn in.

Mr Vajpayee, aged 71, is one of India's most respected parliamentarians. But recent days have shown how easily his BJP can be brought to heel by a rebellious ally.

The BJP owes its invitation to govern to its wayward ally, the Tamil screen queen Jayaram Jayalalitha, and the Italian-born heir to India's enduring political dynasty, Sonia Gandhi.

The summons arrived after Ms Jayalalitha reaffirmed her support for the alliance, and Ms Gandhi ruled out a claim to power by the Congress party.

The denouement to India's political crisis comes after a BJP-led alliance won the most seats — but fell short of a majority — in general elections last month.

The roller-coaster ride, courtesy of Ms Jayalalitha, has shaken the BJP's confidence that it can impose its will on an alliance of regional parties, Sikh separatists, old-style socialists, Hindu extremists and mavericks. In 1996 Mr Vajpayee led a BJP government that collapsed after 13 days.

Despite earlier pledges of support Ms Jayalalitha delayed this government for five days. She angrily denied she had sought to install key allies in the finance and law ministries to influence corruption cases she is fighting.

Ms Jayalalitha was finally mollified after one of the most suave BJP leaders, Jaswant Singh, flew to Madras for negotiations. She agreed to join the government so long as it fulfilled its promises to make Tamil a national language, act in the state's favour in water disputes, and set aside 69 per cent of government jobs for disadvantaged castes.

Ms Jayalalitha, who has acted in more than 100 films, fought the elections with the BJP, and confirmed her unconditional backing for the party. But she then delayed the letter of support for Mr Vajpayee's alliance demanded by the president.

Privately, BJP leaders howled with frustration. "This lady is absolutely crazy," said a party leader after a day of meetings. "In this age, economics is politics. There is no question of giving up finance."

The BJP's consternation owed much to Ms Jayalalitha's unpredictability. Her candidate for finance minister, the mercurial Dr Subramaniam Swamy, was until recently her most bitter enemy, having been instrumental in her fall two years ago in a welter of corruption charges.

Earlier, Ms Gandhi told the president her Congress party would not stake a claim. "We cannot do that because we do not have the numbers," she said.

Ms Gandhi, widow of slain prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, became president of the Congress last weekend amid joyous street celebrations.

Libya 'buying friends' over Lockerbie

Ian Black

ALARM bells are ringing in the United States and Britain at Libya's increasingly successful attempts to undermine United Nations sanctions imposed over the Lockerbie bombing.

Diplomats say that a clandestine attempt by Colonel Muammar Gadafy to buy African support is making it harder to keep the measures in place. An open debate on the sanctions at the Security Council was expected to take place this week; there are expected to be calls for the measures to be lifted.

Sources at UN headquarters in New York say Libya has held secret talks with Gambia, which holds the rotating presidency of the 15-member council, about paying off its debt to the organisation.

Sanctions on aviation links, arms and diplomatic representation were renewed last week, but only after the Gambian ambassador, Abdoulie Momodou Sallah, convened the debate. Mr Sallah was instrumental in steering the discussion along lines favourable to Tripoli.

"There's a lot going on and a lot of money involved," one US official said. "The Libyans like to buy a friend on the council."

Libya has been under sanctions since 1992 after it refused to hand over to US or Scottish authorities two men accused of bombing Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie in December 1988, killing 270 people. Both the US and Britain insist they will not bow to demands for a trial in a neutral venue or a third country.

But with wide support internationally and among the families of the British victims for a compromise over the venue, concern is mounting that the perpetrators may never be brought to justice.

New revelations about recent Libyan activities in Africa include reports that it supplied arms to anti-government rebels in Sierra Leone and undermined Nigerian-led peace enforcement efforts. There are also allegations that Libya directly refused a request by the Nigerian foreign minister, Tom Ikimi, to halt support for the Freetown junta and that the country bought off the Democratic Republic of Congo by selling it 300,000 tons of cheap oil.

"The Libyans have been conducting a major PR campaign focused on those countries that can get the sanctions lifted, and they've been using their oil money and influence to get others to vote on their behalf," said one well-placed source.

London and Washington are playing down the significance of last week's debate. "It's political theatre and will change nothing," said one British diplomat.

But the nightmare scenario is that the US, Britain and France will become so isolated that they have to use their veto to maintain sanctions.

UN sources say they are not surprised at allegations of dirty tricks, but insist that support for Tripoli is largely genuine. "I wouldn't assume that just because someone is doing something the British and Americans don't like means they've been bribed," said one.

The Week

PRESIDENT Boris Yeltsin cancelled all engagements and vanished to one of his country residences with what officials variously called a sore throat, flu and a severe respiratory infection.

ARMENIA'S presidential election was thrown into controversy when several candidates claimed the vote had been marred by fraud.

SERGEANT-MAJOR Gene McKinney, one of the highest ranking enlisted soldiers in the US army, was sentenced to a reduction in rank, but spared a jail term, after his conviction for obstructing an investigation into charges of sexual misconduct.

SWISS investigators believe they have firm evidence that Raúl Salinas, the jailed brother of the former Mexican president Carlos Salinas, made tens of millions of dollars as an intermediary for Colombian drug-trafficking cartels.

THE United States military blamed the crew of a US marines jet for the cable car accident in the Italian Alps last month in which 20 people died.

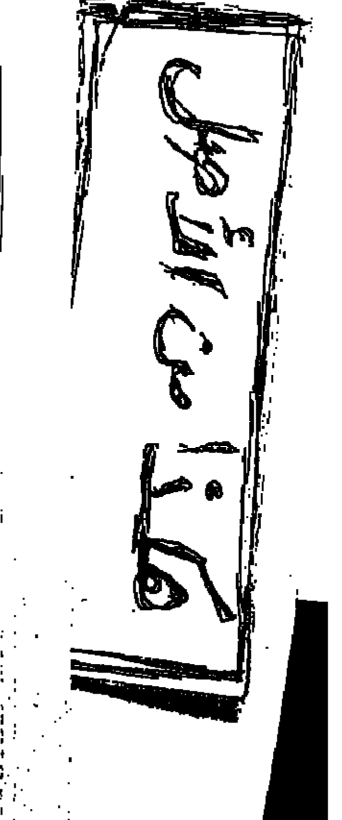
A FLORIDA appeals court reinstated Joe Carollo as Miami's mayor, invalidating a lower court order for a new election.

A PROMINENT Nigerian lawyer and human rights activist, Femi Falana, has been arrested with seven others.

FIREFIGHTERS battling for the past two months against the worst fire in the Amazon have been refused the release of funds already approved to help fight the inferno.

THE Kennedy family suffered another setback when Joe Kennedy, the elder son of Bobby Kennedy, announced he planned to quit politics.

DR BENJAMIN SPOCK, the sage of sensible parenting who advised parents to trust their instincts, has died aged 94.
Obituary next week



Kohl's camp fear his magic has gone

Ian Traynor in Bonn

IF HELMUT Kohl's future is hostage to his horoscope, the stars are looking distinctly inauspicious. The Aries German chancellor, according to one astrologer, has "a hard year ahead".

"He will experience a period of loneliness," Alexander von Dziembowski predicted. His career prospects are less than bright and his health could be better: "In this condition the election campaign will not bring him much fun."

Although the campaign has barely begun and Mr Kohl is a notoriously tough operator when his back is against the wall, those predictions are already looking pertinent.

Barely a day goes by without protests from his lieutenants that there is no alternative candidate to Mr Kohl for the general election on September 27. His Christian Democrat number two, Wolfgang Schäuble, has reiterated that he will not run for chancellor, although the public and many in his party wish he would.

Mr Kohl's strength is foreign policy, which will not win votes. The single European currency either turns voters off or fills them with fear. Mr Kohl's strategy to run as the guarantor of the euro is being quietly shelved.

He is being advised to stop strutting the international stage and to focus on widespread fear and insecurity at home, where unemployment nudges a record 5 million.

Since Gerhard Schröder won elections in Lower Saxony this month and seized the Social Democratic nomination, his bandwagon has picked up speed.

In elections four years ago in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt the Christian and Social Democrats were neck-and-neck at around 35 per cent. An opinion poll last week showed an unprecedented 20-point gap opening up before key elections next month. The CDU slumped to 25 per cent from 33 in January, while the SPD soared 7 per cent to 45. A national poll showed the SPD rising to 45 per cent while the CDU and its sister Christian Social Union in Bavaria slid to 34 per cent.

Leading Bavarian conservatives are suggesting that Mr Kohl is more of a liability than an asset and that he should refrain from campaigning in the southern state, which has an election two weeks before the national poll in September.

The chancellor's friends are complaining of a mood of fatalism in the Kohl camp and the chorus of different views on how to reverse the slide grows louder by the day.

Last week Mr Schäuble complained that the election campaign was becoming too personalised and American-style because of the "Schröder effect". But for the past 15 years Mr Kohl has personified the CDU and Germany at large, and has ruthlessly sidelined all pretenders to his crown.

Although Mr Schröder is cannily issuing repeated warnings against over-optimism, leading Social Democrats are having trouble wiping the grins off their faces as the CDU resorts to a combination of whingeing and scare tactics.

Mr Kohl will no doubt claw back some of the ground he is losing. But he is facing his most formidable challenger yet.



Meeting of minds . . . the leader of the ex-communist Party of Democratic Socialism, former East German human rights lawyer Gregor Gysi, right, discusses tactics with PDS nominee Angela Marquardt. The party has also nominated a former spy chief and a former cycling star PHOTO: HANS EDINGER

Young Russia takes to cash economy

James Meek in Moscow

THEY ARE young, they are beautiful, they are full of hope — and untainted by 80 years of doleful, blinkered Soviet propaganda. The new generation of cola-drinking, gum-chewing, liberated Russian youth, raised when communism was already dying, has something to say in its first eager steps into the world of work: "Show me the money."

In a discreet brown envelope, preferably. The latest annual survey of social attitudes among young Russians reports that more than half of all 17-year-olds see nothing wrong with looking for a job where they stand a chance of being bribed. Nine per cent said they would be actively looking for something in that line.

Showing an instinctive grasp of market relations in a transitional economy, 65 per cent said they would marry for money and 28 per cent that they would consent to paid sex.

Almost half of those surveyed said they believed it was acceptable to take what you wanted by force.

Professor Boris Ruchkin, head of the Russian Institute of Youth's research centre, admitted the figures were worrying, but said they should be seen in the context of a generation which, for the first time in Russia, accepted liberty as normal. "Young people are better adapted to the conditions of a market economy," he said. "They don't want to return to the past."

They want cash — 57 per cent said money was the most important thing in life.

Of all today's desirable careers, only that of lawyer — much more lucrative than 10 years ago — emerged from Soviet times. Young Russians want to be — in descending order — manager of a commercial bank, management executive, bodyguard and mafia boss.

The survey questioned 3,839 people in three age groups — 17, 24 and 30 — across Russia.

The report noted that in reality many youngsters were likely to end up in one of three of Russia's fastest-growing new businesses — among the 10 million small traders, the 483,000 security guards or the 400,000 workers in the gambling industry.

Clinton crisis over sex claim

BILL CLINTON'S critics scented fresh political blood as the woman at the centre of the latest sexual harassment allegations rocking his presidency broke her media silence and the White House faced its worst crisis since the Monica Lewinsky affair broke earlier this year, *writes Martin Kettle in Washington.*

Kathleen Willey gave a television interview in which she spoke publicly for the first time about a 1993 incident in which Mr Clinton is said to have fondled her against her will in the White House. "I could not believe the recklessness of that act," Ms Willey said. She added the president had lied under oath about the incident.

A demoralised White House began yet another public relations offensive on Monday, releasing a series of apparently friendly letters sent to the president by Ms Willey after the date of the alleged incident.

Mr Clinton denied the claims, saying he was "bewildered, mystified and disappointed" as to why she had invented such stories.

Ms Willey alleged she was the victim of "horrible behaviour" and said she considered slapping his face but "I don't think you can slap the president of the United States".

Trunkful of trouble, page 6

'The Boss' to lead China's parliament

Andrew Higgins and Reuters

CHINA'S reformist economic tsar, Zhu Rongji, was elected prime minister by parliament on Tuesday to replace the conservative Li Peng.

In all, 2,890 delegates to the National People's Congress voted in favour of 69-year-old Mr Zhu, while 29 voted against and 31 abstained. Mr Zhu was the only candidate.

Nicknamed "The Boss" for his no-nonsense style, Mr Zhu, who tamed galloping inflation in the mid-1990s, takes over with a mandate to overhaul crumbling state industries and rescue a banking system that is technically bankrupt.

He replaces China's shrillest champion of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, Mr Li, aged 69, who was required to step down at the end of his second five-year term. Mr Li was endorsed on Monday as chairman of the congress, prompting a burst of impotent dissent from the rubber-stamp parliament.

In a one-candidate "election", more than 10 per cent of delegates voted against Mr Li or abstained — a loss of face for the widely detested former engineer but not a threat to his appointment by the Communist Party's inner circle.

His unpopularity was highlighted by near unanimous votes for Jiang Zemin, in a second term as state president, and Hu Jintao, the former party boss in Tibet, as vice-president.

Mr Zhu's mission has been given urgency by the Asian financial crisis that threatens China's exports and its foreign investment inflows. He is widely disliked among the Chinese bureaucracy and officials of state banks and enterprises, but nevertheless is respected for his solid track record in economic management.

He was expected to reshuffle the cabinet and nominate vice-premiers and other officials for endorsement by parliament this week.

Washington Post, page 17

Ruined hamlet reveals Serbian assault

Jonathan Steele in Prekaz

CHICKENS peck their way over smashed sofas in what was Adem Jashari's living room. The walls of the Prekaz village leader's home have gaping holes from mortar fire.

Apart from abandoned animals, and a dwindling number of journalists visiting the ruined hamlet and the field where 54 mounds mark the graves of victims of last week's Serbian attack, Prekaz is lifeless. Paramilitary police watch through binoculars from their base in a pine wood above the village, but they no longer stop visitors.

As the shock of the Serbian onslaught abates, the questions surrounding it multiply. Was the attack a genuine effort to eliminate suspected ethnic Albanian terrorists or a message of intimidation to an entire society? Is the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) — which aides of the Yugoslav president, Slobodan Milosevic, claim Mr Jashari helped lead — a guerrilla organisation or clan leaders defending their patch?

The region of Drenica, in which Prekaz lies some 32km west of Kosovo's capital, Pristina, has always been a wild area with little love for outside government, whether by the Turks, the Yugoslav monarchy or President Tito's communist state. Its isolation stems from its lack of strategic significance, and its tight clan structure which, until this month, alien rulers saw little need to challenge.

That frustration at Serbia's ending of Kosovo's autonomy should lead to armed resistance is hardly surprising. The KLA "only appeared in April 1996 and started to act publicly last year", Shkelzen Maliqi, a local political analyst, says.

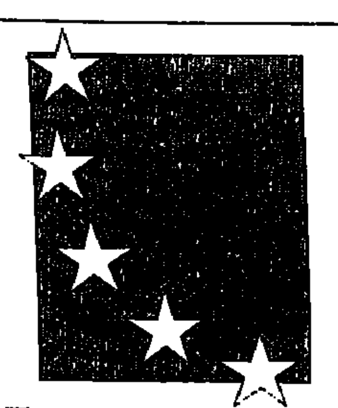
"At first we thought it was a small group, with logistical support from abroad, which attacked Serb police stations. Since last autumn local people in Drenica have appeared with arms, and it looked more like the start of a guerrilla movement."

A journalist on the Albanian-language paper Koha, who encountered KLA representatives in Drenica last year, says: "They did not look like a powerful or confident group." Like many ethnic Albanians he argues that the KLA's importance has been exaggerated by Belgrade propaganda to justify repression.

Azem Vllasi, an ethnic Albanian in the former League of Communists, says: "The Jashari family is strong and famous locally, but it had no political agenda." President Milosevic's police action, he adds, was nothing more than a big display of force "to scare Albanians in general".



Cook's fudge keeps irate partners sweet



Europe this week

Martin Walker

BRITAIN last week tried to energise what has so far been its rather limp presidency of the European Union with a conference in London for all the new applicants seeking to join the EU club. But true to dispiriting form, the key member of the conference failed to come.

The boycott by Turkey, angry at its exclusion from the first and second wave of EU expansion and Britain's insistence that enlargement talks include Cyprus, removed much of the point of arranging the conference.

But the Queen had been booked for lunch at Buckingham Palace and the invitations had all gone out. So despite the lack of Turks, the event not only had to be presented as useful in its own right, but even more as Britain's relaunch of what some EU partners are privately calling the Stealth Presidency.

With no big EU treaty negotiations under way, and the main course already charted of launching the single currency and enlarging the Union into central Europe, the UK presidency was never going to be an historic event. Perhaps wisely, given the record under the Thatcher-Major governments, Tony Blair's team took the civil service's advice and decided to do little, yet do it well enough to convince the other 14 member states that Britain was now a co-operative team player.

But almost halfway through the British term, the softly-softly strategy has been succeeding almost too well, and has become distinctly flat. The few headlines have been of the wrong kind. Early attempts by the British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, to make a stab at a foreign policy consensus on Algeria and Iran, and a new code of conduct on the arms trade, ran into the usual divided British loyalties between the United States alliance and the EU partners over the latest crisis with Iraq.

So last week saw the concocted fanfare, not just with the London conference of all the heads of government from the Atlantic to the Russian border, but with a summit of EU foreign ministers in Edinburgh. There was even a special little summit of Europe's socialists, among whom Blair graciously agreed to be included so long as they accept his ideological leadership away from much of what socialists once believed.

The main themes at Edinburgh were supposed to be issues of enlargement and the Middle East, over which all agreed that Blair could talk tough for all of Europe when he goes to Israel at Easter to do his bit for the collapsed peace process. Binyamin Netanyahu may not be quaking in his boots, but Yasser Arafat should expect some hard questioning about the fate of the $1.6 billion of EU money that has been the bulk of the international effort to sustain the Palestinian Authority.

But just as the Iraq crisis hijacked the opening months of Cook's tenure as chair of the EU's general affairs council, so the Edinburgh meeting was overwhelmed by the Kosovo crisis. It is already threatening to become a dreadful replay of the Bosnian disaster, as Europe once again grapples with the problem of Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic. And once again, the Europeans have privately decided that the job is too big for anyone but the Americans. At least this time there have been no vainglorious boasts that Europe can handle the crisis in its own backyard.

Cook came up with some face-saving plans for Milosevic at Edinburgh. The EU will convene a Balkan regional conference in Paris, with the US and Russia, to show their joint determination to stop the Kosovo crisis from spreading instability into Albania, Macedonia and elsewhere in the region. In effect, this will be conference designed to contain Serbia.

"We are showing a degree of unity and urgency in Kosovo which was unfortunately not present when the Bosnian crisis broke out in 1991," Cook said. The EU also appointed the former Spanish prime minister Felipe Gonzáles to be a special representative "to offer our authority and our resources to back mediation between Serbia and the Albanian community in Kosovo". On top of that, the EU agreed to start planning detailed implementation of sanctions against Serbia.

This will include a ban on travel visas for Belgrade officials, and the refusal of all European government credit for commercial deals with Serbia. Cook also threatened war crimes trials for Serbian security forces in Kosovo, stressing that the writ of the International War Crimes Tribunal extended to their recent actions, in which more than 80 Kosovars have been killed.

But the trickiest challenge loomed suddenly over Cyprus, and at one point threatened to derail the whole process of EU enlargement. France warned it would block entry for a Cyprus that remained divided, and Greece retorted that it would retaliate by stalling the accession process for the other five eastern European countries poised to begin entry negotiations this month.

European foreign ministers managed to avoid a direct clash over this tangled question by agreeing that Cyprus would start the accession negotiations on time on March 31, but on probation. The European Council of Ministers would have the right to freeze the talks at any time if the politics of the divided island soured. The issue that has been deferred is whether the EU can absorb a Cyprus that looks like a larger version of the old Berlin.

This fudge was skilfully achieved by Cook, who chaired the meeting and has significantly buttressed his standing among his EU colleagues. But the nail-biting now begins, as the EU awaits the formal reaction of the Turkish-Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktash, to the offer from the Cyprus president, Glafkos Clerides, of "full membership" for the Turkish community in the Cypriot delegation that will negotiate entry terms with the EU.

Complications remain. Denktash has usually proved vulnerable only to pressure from Turkey, and Ankara has little reason to help the EU pull its chestnuts out of the Cypriot fire. Not only has it been excluded from the forthcoming accession process, but Greece is still blocking the $410 million in EU funds to which Turkey is legally entitled under its customs agreement with Brussels. But that issue was left for another day. Cook has learned the essential art of EU compromise, which hinges on the principle that a battle deferred is better than a battle lost.

Comment, page 14

President hopes to pack away domestic troubles



Washington diary

Martin Kettle

THE CITY of Louisville in Kentucky boasts possibly the world's only statue King Louis XVI of France — in honour of the man from whom it takes its name.

It is doubly odd to find a statue of the last of the Bourbons in the middle of a mid-western state because Louis XVI is otherwise such an unglorified (and inglorious) figure, and because the beheaded king was not much of a traveller, least of all to Kentucky.

Whether this intense reluctance to leave the seat of power can be said to have had any bearing on his ultimate fate is hard to say. If it does, then Louis XVI offers a powerful cautionary lesson to all threatened political leaders on the dangers of not travelling, and it is a lesson that President Bill Clinton, for one, has not been slow to learn.

Recent history suggests that second-term United States presidents develop a tendency to travel. No longer facing re-election, both Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan devoted much more of their second terms to foreign policy and personal diplomacy — in both cases with important results.

Last year, the first since he fought the final election of his career, Clinton showed no great sign of wishing to emulate his Republican predecessors. Indeed, compared with both Nixon and Reagan, and even with single-termers Jimmy Carter and George Bush, Clinton has rarely appeared to want to be a foreign policy president.

Embarrassed in Somalia, bogged down in Bosnia, ineffectual in the Arab-Israeli process, Clinton's foreign affairs strategy has often seemed piecemeal and short-term, marked by a dithering and inconsistency when confronted with long-term choices, notably in relation to Iraq.

Yet things could hardly be more different today. Foreign policy, all of a sudden, absorbs Clinton's attention. This week, Clinton heads off on a two-week-long swing through West, East and Southern Africa, none of them top foreign policy destinations for a US president in the past, which will take him to Senegal, Ghana, Uganda, Rwanda, Botswana and South Africa. And there is much more to come.

The African visit is merely the first in a series of globetrots that will make 1998 the heaviest year for presidential foreign travel since Clinton's election in 1992. Next month he plans almost a week in South America, parts of which he also visited late last year. In May Clinton travels to Britain for the Group of Seven plus Russia world economic summit, on to which he will tack visits to Germany and, possibly, to Russia and Ireland.

Then in June, newly announced in the past few days, he will make a trip to China — with a possible stopover in Japan *en route* for home — that had originally been pencilled into his diary for last November.

In every case, let it be said, these are foreign visits with their own justifications and logics. The long-planned African visit comes on the back of Congress's adoption last week of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, a Clinton-backed free trade measure that paves the way for duty- and quota-free exports to the US from 48 sub-Saharan African nations and, ultimately, for a broader US-Africa free trade zone.

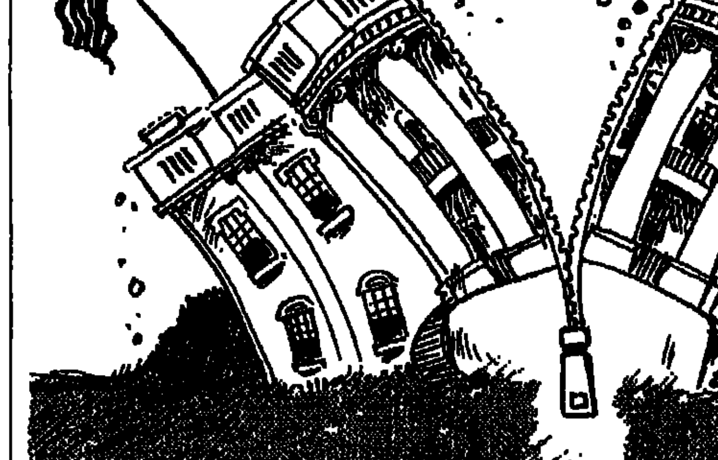
The new legislation is more symbolic than real in many ways, given the relatively miniscule amounts of trade between the US and Africa, but in international political terms it is all of a piece with the foreign policy free trade initiatives that Clinton has begun in Latin America and to which he has started to put his shoulder in relations with China.

This is definitely not the only common theme or common explanation of this concentration of travel opportunities. Clinton may be in favour of reducing barriers to international trade, but his political future does not depend on it. He may believe that personal diplomacy is genuinely more effective in moving these things forward than negotiations through established diplomatic and international bodies.

Yet the issue on which his presidency hangs is not free trade, but sex and lies. Seen from the White House, 1998 is infinitely more about surviving Monica Lewinsky, Paula Jones and Kathleen Willey than it is about regulating terms for the import of textile and electronic goods from the developing world.

Assuming that by the end of this month Judge Susan Webber Wright rules that the Jones case can come to court, it will begin to do so in Little Rock on May 27. For the first few days, perhaps even a couple of weeks, jurors will be empanelled and the case will hang fire. Then, as the case finally gets under way, defendant Clinton — who has no intention of showing up in court at any stage of the proceedings — will jet off with the First Lady to Beijing accompanied by the White House press corps and the world's television news teams for 10 days of undistracted, undiluted presidential grandeur and photo opportunities.

Like everything else in modern politics, presidential travel is a servant of presidential media strategy. Clinton's strategy is simple. Have trouble, will travel. Louis XVI never got that right, and paid the price. He did get a statue in Louisville, though, which is probably more than Clinton can expect.



Africa markets shape Clinton itinerary

Alex Duval Smith
in Johannesburg

BILL CLINTON'S six-nation tour of Africa next week — the first by a serving United States president for almost 20 years — will reward good book-balancers and strategic friends. But it will also lay bare mixed African feelings about the extent to which fragile economies can live up to Washington's expectations.

Last week 16 West African foreign affairs ministers, meeting in Ivory Coast, resolved that Ecomog — the Nigerian-led force which ousted the military junta in Sierra Leone — should become the region's permanent peacekeeping force.

The hard-won decision was a signal to the US, Britain and France — countries that like the idea of hands-on input in African peacekeeping without the messy business of providing troops — that at least part of the continent can police itself.

At the same time, Washington sent back the message — through a House of Representatives vote on measures to encourage trade with Africa — that it has its eye on 700 million potential consumers.

As Susan Rice, the US assistant secretary of state for African affairs, said: "Africans are taking their seats at the global economic table and arriving with hearty appetites for lucrative commercial dealings."

Mr Clinton claims that his 12-day visit to Ghana, Uganda, Rwanda (for a brief stopover), South Africa, Botswana and Senegal is about "delivering the message that the US stands ready to be a partner in Africa's prosperity".

He will signal to the US, and especially African Americans, that there is more to the continent than starvation, drought and war. His wife Hillary and their daughter Chelsea will add a human touch, joining him on visits to upbeat development projects, successful Aids campaigns and women's groups.

That the famine-ridden Africans of the cold war years have been reinvented as trading partners grates somewhat with the likes of President Nelson Mandela of South Africa. His country, unavoidable for Mr Clinton because of its economic might, is also the Americans' most sceptical host.

In his new year speech at Mafikeng, Mr Mandela pulled no punches in his condemnation of what he called America's "ambitious and extensive" aid-for-trade agenda and the debt noose in which the Western world holds Africa. On the other hand, the deputy president, Thabo Mbeki, is known as an economic realist who will lend a ready ear to the US president.

Although it detracts from his feel-good agenda, Mr Clinton decided last week that a stop-off in Rwanda was unavoidable. He will "address the gross genocide and violence that has so disrupted Central Africa", said the presidential spokesman, Mike McCurry.

Some observers have criticised Mr Clinton's lack of a human rights agenda and the fact that Rwanda was an afterthought. But most agree that his visit is good news for Africa.

Steven Friedman, director of the South African Centre for Policy Studies, said: "Few people expect new factories to spring up just because President Clinton has dropped by. But there is a pretty broad consensus that Africa needs investment and that we are now a continent divided not by superpowers but between super businesses."

Turks play music to calm riot police

John Ezard

TURKISH security chiefs last week unveiled a four-point scheme to calm their notoriously headbanging riot police.

Point one is plastic instead of wooden truncheons. Point two is plastic rather than steel handcuffs. Point three is radio transceivers so that they can be ordered to stop hitting demonstrators.

But the most fiendish item in the plan is point four. Soothing Western classical music — "especially Mozart and Beethoven" — will be played to them as they wait behind the scenes in riot coaches.

The aim is to stop them getting twitchy and paranoid. Ankara's assistant police chief, Kutlay Celik, said: "The music will have a soothing effect on the brains of those who are not so polite."

Clashes with Islamists, trade unionists and Kurdish demonstrators have given crack anti-riot units — known until now as Steel Force — a somewhat impolite reputation.

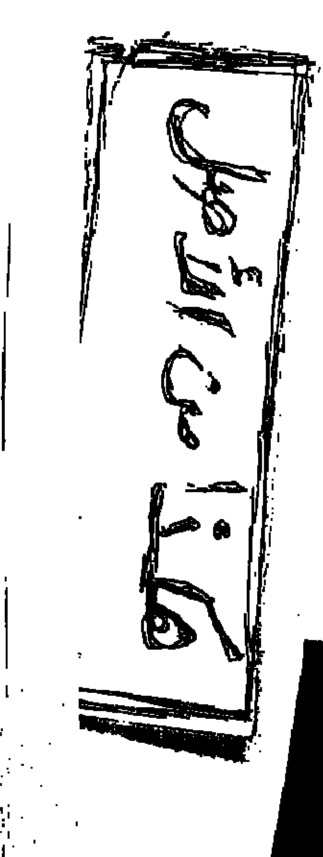
Western human rights monitors have criticised Turkey's way of handling dissent. But the last straw came when police began beating up their fellow civil servants.

"Extremist factions in the demonstrations tease the police and then escape," said Orhan Tung, counsellor at the Turkish embassy in London. "Law-abiding civil servants who are demonstrating are the ones who get hit."

While Turks like Western as well as their own classical music, the initiative is expected to broaden the taste of some Steel Force members.

The government is also aware of a potential hitch: the martial vigour of Turkish *janizary* (infantry) music has been a major influence on Western classics since the 18th century. Composers who have used it include Haydn, Gluck and Bartok. Heady strains of it are present in Mozart's "Die Entführung aus dem Serail" and the finale of Beethoven's ninth symphony.

"We shall have to be careful what we play," Mr Tung said. "Not Beethoven's Turkish March — and definitely no Wagner."



Malnourished three- and four-year-olds at North Korea's Tokchon nursery PHOTO: HILARY MACKENZIE

On the border of despair

Andrew Higgins hears tales of misery from North Koreans facing starvation who are forced to make perilous forays into China in search of food

THROUGH three long North Korean winters, the mother from Musan waited stoically as hunger pared her body until she weighed less than she did three decades ago as a teenage girl.

Last week, terrifying talk swept through her mountain mining town and fear finally conquered fatalism. The government had announced — not to its own people but they had heard the rumours — that food stocks would run out this month. It was time to risk everything, she calculated. Or die.

With a friend, she trekked 50km to the border with China wearing thin cotton shoes, a ragged red top and a worn jacket. After nightfall, she stepped on to the ice still covering much of the Tumen river, no longer merely a frontier between states but a boundary between starvation and survival.

For an awful moment, the gamble seemed lost. The ice cracked. The 44-year-old mother of three plunged into the frigid water but managed to wade to the other side.

Two days later, cowering in a warm farmhouse out of reach of North Korean border guards, she was still terrified, still filthy but also still certain of her reckless act of self-preservation. "We have to rely on ourselves now. If you don't, you starve."

In a few days, she hopes to return the way she came with whatever food she has been able to scrounge, scavenge and barter. Her target is a 20kg sack of corn meal, more than her family of five has eaten for the past two months.

Her return could be even more perilous. North Korea has just put its troops on a war footing, an annual ritual of mass mobilisation. Tanks and troops stage mock battles. Even traffic police don camouflage capes to direct phantom traffic. As the country starves, the military clings to its fossilised rites of vigilance.

Since North Korea first sounded the alarm after flooding in 1995, governments, aid workers and academics have argued over the scale of the crisis. Their different versions are often based on the same source: chaperoned and scripted visits to schools and hospitals.

"We see only what they want to show us. One week a kindergarten is full of malnourished kids. A week later it is full of well-fed children doing dances and singing songs. Frankly, we have no idea what is really going on," admitted one aid worker.

When Pyongyang wants sympathy — which it does now as the United Nations World Food Programme makes a new food appeal — it raises slightly an opaque curtain of secrecy, paranoia and pride. Once aid is on its way, the shutters come down.

Arithmetic over mortality rates has obscured a catastrophe that goes far beyond maize and rice. A modern industrial state of more than 20 million people is withering away: fuel is scarcer than food; factories have seized up; entire cities go dark at night.

A journey across the country on an electrified rail network can take weeks because of power cuts — and kill off weaker passengers *en route*.

Only the collected works of the late patriarch Kim Il-sung are in abundance: pupils still strong enough to attend school write lessons in their margins, according to one refugee.

Thousands of starving North Koreans have slipped across the Tumen river, skirting border guards enfeebled by hunger and ignoring China's own feeble protection against trespassers: signs in Chinese and Korean warning that it is "forbidden to traverse the border illegally".



Some dream of making it to South Korea or settling in China; many, particularly jobless mothers, cross over for a few days to forage and bargain for food.

"They often pretend they are trading but in reality it is begging," said an old woman who has given sanctuary and sustenance to a stream of malnourished escapees. "They cry when they see what we feed the pigs. Our pigs eat far better than people do over there."

The Chinese side of the river is inhabited by ethnic Koreans linked by blood, history and language to North Korea. Periodic swoops by Chinese police and fines of up to $1,300 for helping intruders have failed to curb their charity — and illicit commerce.

MANY of the more desperate refugees flee into the trackless forests of Changbai mountain, a sacred volcanic peak that Koreans call Mount Paektu and which North Korean propaganda celebrates as the birthplace of Kim Il-sung's son and successor, Kim Jong-il. Those hoping to return home stick closer to the river.

In a riverside hamlet on the road to Changbai mountain two North Korean women were hiding last week in a single-room farmhouse waiting for nightfall. On the other side of the Tumen dawdled armed North Korean soldiers.

One of the women was a young mother who had slipped across a week earlier with her sick baby. She was now on her way back to a collective farm barren of fertiliser, seed, fuel and drugs. Stacked near the door were bags and boxes of food and clothing from relatives in China. They had also given her sweets to keep the baby from crying, and alerting guards, during the crossing.

The other woman was on her second illicit visit to China. Many in her home town of Taehongdan (Great Red Army) are so feeble they "walk like drunks and look like skeletons". Only officials have been spared. "As soon as you see someone you can tell their status from the way they walk, the colour of their skin."

She said that her own parents had died in 1995 and she blamed their death on starvation rations, scoffing at the official explanation that North Korea's agony began only after flooding three years ago.

Unlike the Great Famine of 1958-61 in China, when 30 million people died, hunger in North Korea seems to have hit towns harder than villages. While workers on state farms often have small semi-private plots of land, urban residents rely entirely on government rations.

Foreign food aid feeds into this system, but refugees complain that even the starvation rations they are supposed to get rarely arrive.

"It was not enough to eat when they gave it to us. Now it is impossible to survive," said the mother from Musan. In January her family received 58 grammes of grain per person per day — less than a tenth of the amount needed. In February it dwindled further.

How many people have perished is impossible to quantify. Estimates range from an official figure of several score to a staggering 2 million. Most aid workers dismiss the latter as far-fetched but admit they see only what the government wants them to see.

Last year the United States aid group World Vision said at least 500,000 and up to 2 million people had starved. The World Food Programme in 1997 increased the number of North Koreans to whom it distributed food from 4.7 million to 7.5 million (out of a population of 24 million).

The German Red Cross has called North Korea's famine one of the worst since the second world war and said 10,000 children were dying of starvation every month. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies warned recently that more than 5 million North Koreans were near starvation.

Pressure to see more is limited by the West's own agenda: food is part of a bigger political and military calculus. The US wants a formal peace treaty to replace a 1953 Korean war armistice agreement and is reluctant to upset talks due to resume in Geneva.

Occasionally, the charade comes unstuck. One charity was taken to kindergartens to admire how much its aid had helped but stumbled on two nurseries that had clearly not received the script in time. "Even our minders were shocked by the state of malnourished children," said a foreign aid worker.

A foreign expert who took three days' worth of food made what should have been a seven-hour train journey to Pyongyang and arrived famished seven days later. The woman from Taehongdan, a city of 40,000, said she had seen bodies dumped on to the platform at a rail junction near the Chinese border.

At Tumen town, the region's biggest border crossing, the misery has become a macabre tourist attraction. Chinese entrepreneurs hawk Kim Il-sung badges and North Korean bank notes, and rent out binoculars for a peek at the crumbling buildings of Namyang, the town on the other bank. Carved into the hills above Namyang, a giant fading slogan commands "Full Speed Ahead".

During the day, a trickle of cars and pedestrians cross the span as divided families shout to each other across the river. At night the Chinese side blazes with light while Namyang disappears into darkness.

"Most people don't know anything. They think this is the way it has to be and that everyone lives like this in other countries too," said the woman from Great Red Army. "We are completely blind."

Comment, page 14

Hero of the revolution

OBITUARY
Manuel Piñeiro

FEW people played such a significant role in the foreign activities of the Cuban revolution as Manuel Piñeiro Losada, who has died in a car crash aged 64.

"Barbaroja" (or "Red Beard"), as he was known, set up the Cuban security apparatus in the early years of the revolution, and had special responsibilities for revolutionary developments in Latin America for more than 30 years. For much of that period, Piñeiro, after Fidel Castro and his brother Raúl, was the most influential figure in the Cuban regime.

He orchestrated Che Guevara's guerrilla activities in Bolivia in 1966-67, as well as earlier campaigns in Argentina and the Congo. In the 1980s he coordinated revolutionary movements in Central America and the Caribbean. He helped the Sandinistas seize power in Nicaragua, and was the man responsible for Cuban relations with the guerrilla movements in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Piñeiro was born in the provincial Cuban town of Matanzas, the son of Spanish immigrants from Galicia. He was sent to New York to study business at Columbia university. In 1958 he returned and, like many young professionals, joined Castro's guerrilla army.

After the Bay of Pigs fiasco in 1961, he was put in charge of promoting revolutionary movements throughout Latin America and was also responsible for infiltration into the Cuban exile organisations in Miami.

After the military coup in Chile in 1973, and the death of Salvador Allende, Fidel Castro began to downpedal the possibilities of revolutionary change in Latin America. But Piñeiro continued to find ways to assist insurrectionary movements in the region independently of the Soviet Union and, to some extent, of the Cuban state.

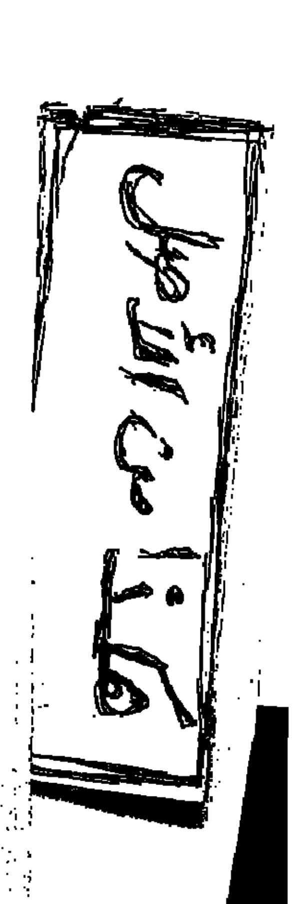
In 1977 when the Argentine urban guerrilla movement, the Montoneros, was politically in *decline* (but immensely rich as a result of successful kidnapping operations), he persuaded them to use their ill-gotten gains to help finance the burgeoning Sandinista movement in Nicaragua, which eventually seized power in 1979.

After the Sandinista victory, Piñeiro returned to favour in Cuba but after their defeat his fortunes changed yet again. He lost his position as head of the Americas department in 1992 — an indication, perhaps, that the export of revolution was finally off the Cuban agenda.

Piñeiro was a man of legendary charm, a *bon viveur*, and a brilliant raconteur with a fund of endless jokes.

He had a vast and influential coterie of friends on the Latin American left, but was tight-lipped about his operations, as befitted a secret police chief.

Manuel Piñeiro Losada, revolutionary, born March 14, 1933; died March 12, 1998



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Crime squad to track British villains in Europe

Duncan Campbell

BRITISH career criminals have been moving their bases to France and Holland to avoid the heavy police surveillance and increasingly violent turf wars in Britain.

They are making cross-border alliances with other European criminals, using the south of Spain as the main meeting place.

The highly organised multinational career criminal will be a prime target of the National Crime Squad to be launched on April 1.

Its director-general, Roy Penrose, said the police had to match the changing pattern of British crime. He expected almost half the investigations launched by his officers to involve European connections.

Mr Penrose, former head of the drug squad and the organised crime branch at Scotland Yard, said mainland Europe offered many attractions for British criminals. He cites the case of Curtis Warren, the Liverpudlian drug dealer jailed for 12 years in Holland last year for conspiring to import drugs worth £100 million.

"He felt threatened by the death of [David] Ungi, so he moved to Holland," said Mr Penrose. (Ungi was another Liverpool criminal shot dead in 1995.) He said the National Crime Squad would pursue about 180 major British criminals and their teams, and this would take them to Europe.

The Dordogne was becoming particularly popular because of the large British community into which criminals could blend. The career criminal could establish himself in his own *gite*. Dozens of families were known to have settled there.

Spain is no longer quite so popular since the extradition loophole was closed. "But Spain is still very important," Mr Penrose said. "There's a heavy ex-pat community there."

The arrival of a Russian newspaper on the Costa del Sol was an indication that there was a large enough Russian community to support it. Among that community were almost certainly organised criminals.

The southern coast of Spain was an ideal location for criminals of different nationalities to conduct business. Language was not a problem for the British criminal, Mr Penrose said, because English was now so widely used.

Improved telecommunications systems and easier travel meant that the criminal could easily work in continental Europe, in the same way that people in other professions were appreciating the attractions of cheaper property and a friendlier climate.

The National Crime Squad was first mooted in 1990 by the former Commissioner of the Metropolitan police, Sir Peter Imbert. It will have a staff of 1,450 detectives seconded from their own forces and based in 44 locations in England and Wales.

The detectives, from regional crime squads, will have applied for what Mr Penrose described as "a bloody super job". Regional squads will be amalgamated into the national squad and cease to exist from next month.

The new squad's function will be "to prevent and detect serious crime which is of relevance to more than one police area in England and Wales". It will work alongside the National Criminal Intelligence Squad.

Drugs will be a major focus of its work, linked to around 75 per cent of the crime investigated.

BBC bans use of its name in lottery row

Kamal Ahmed

THE BBC has banned its name from adverts for the TV Dreams lottery scratchcard in a last-ditch effort to distance the corporation from one of the most controversial programmes it has ever broadcast.

The BBC's National Lottery Big Ticket Show, where the public have to buy the £2 scratchcard to win a chance to appear on the programme, has been widely condemned by politicians and church organisations as the "biggest gambling show in history".

One source closely involved in the programme, to be launched next week, described it as "a 50-minute advert for Camelot" — the lottery operator which is putting up a £100,000 first prize for the show from the National Lottery prize fund.

After a series of backroom battles, Camelot and MacLaurin Communications, which is handling the huge publicity drive for the programme, have been ordered not to use the BBC name or logo in any of their promotional material.

Camelot had to scrap a series of newspaper interviews with the show's presenters after the BBC demanded that it retain "complete control" over all aspects of the programme.

Executives closely involved with the programme said that the decision to ban the use of the BBC name had come "from the most senior levels" after fears that the corporation was facing a public relations disaster.

"They know they are stretching their charter to the limit. The whole point of the programme is that you have to buy a scratchcard to have a chance to be a contestant. For the BBC to then stick their heads in the sand and pretend that the scratchcard is nothing to do with them is ridiculous," one source said.

"It is completely hypocritical," said Gerald Kaufman, the Labour chairman of the culture select committee of the House of Commons, who was expected to raise the issue in Parliament this week.

He said: "The BBC is promoting the sale of a commercial product, and more than that is paying to make the programme which does it. It has not stretched the limits of the charter, it has completely broken them."

The BBC argues that buying a scratchcard is not a BBC competition, and so the rules do not apply.



Tobacco firms hit by research claims

Clare Longrigg

MEDICAL experts joined anti-smoking campaigners in condemning the tobacco industry as "untrustworthy" last weekend, after a memo proved that cigarette manufacturers possessed evidence nearly 30 years ago that smoking damages health.

An internal memo from Gallaher, the British company that makes top brands Benson & Hedges and Silk Cut, reveals that research using beagles proved that smoking caused lung cancer. The memo was written in April 1970.

A British Medical Association spokesman condemned the tobacco industry. He said the document proved the industry had been duplicitous. "This follows a series of documents from America showing that the industry has been aware for several decades that smoking is addictive and is linked to cancer. The industry is untrustworthy and cannot be believed. We urge them to admit that smoking causes cancer."

Martyn Day, a solicitor who represents 50 lung cancer victims who are suing Gallaher and Imperial Tobacco, said the document was an important piece of evidence.

"It is the first document we have seen which shows us what was really going on behind the scenes at British tobacco companies," he said. "But we believe there are a lot more like it still to come out."

The memo was prepared for the managing director of Gallaher by the firm's general research manager, who analysed experiments carried out on beagles.

It said research "proves beyond all reasonable doubt the causation of lung cancer by smoke". It continues: "Results of the research would appear to us to remove the controversy regarding the causation of human lung cancer although it does not help us directly with the problem of how to modify our cigarettes".

Clive Bates, director of Action on Smoking and Health said: "What we have here is a document which will blow their arguments out of the water. The evasions on smoking and lung cancer have to stop."

Indian addiction, page 15

Cricket board pressured woman to have abortion

Amelia Gentleman

TIM LAMB, chief executive of the England and Wales Cricket Board, pressured an employee into having an abortion and sacked her afterwards, an industrial tribunal ruled last week.

A culture of deep-rooted misogyny dominated the headquarters of cricket, former receptionist Theresa Harrild claimed. She won her claim of sexual discrimination at the end of a hearing where she detailed how "enormous pressure" from Mr Lamb to have an abortion caused her to suffer a nervous breakdown and to make two suicide attempts. ECB executives were concerned only to protect the career of Nick Marriner, a development executive, who had made her pregnant during a brief affair, she said.

No ECB representatives were present at the hearing and the board offered no defence.

Ms Harrild, aged 32, said Mr Lamb had told her early in January 1997 that it would be "the 'best thing all round' if I 'got rid of it'. I felt I was being pressurised into a decision I didn't want to make. He told me that if the right career opportunities came along, I couldn't be considered if I was pregnant or had to look after children." She said that Cliff Barker, the deputy chief executive of the ECB, gave her money for a private abortion.

Ms Harrild added: "I felt their involvement was about protecting a male colleague. I was just a nasty mess that had to be cleaned up."

She returned to work but was suffering from severe depression. They constantly reassured that her she would not lose her job, so she was surprised in June to be visited at home by Mr Barker who handed her a letter of dismissal and offered her a £5,000 pay-off.

She rejected the money.

Ms Harrild, who is still severely depressed, said that if she had known she was going to lose her job, she might not have had a termination.

Philosophers balk at thought of Shell

BRITAIN'S leading centre for public philosophy is in moral turmoil over a real world question: Is a State of Non-Being Better than Existence Courtesy of Shell?, *writes John Vidal.*

The world's second biggest company is the sole sponsor of the Centre for Philosophical Studies at Kings's College London. But resentment that a corporation with a much-debated human rights record in Africa should be able to capitalise on pure thought boiled over last week — a group of 40 undergraduates, lecturers and postgrads has demanded that the centre should drop Shell sponsorship next year.

The problem of what to do with Shell's £60,000 grant is tangled. All students, says one observer, are in a state of *entzauberung*, or philosophical disenchantment, with Shell. The Kantean fundamentalists say it is morally imperative to return the cash immediately, even if it means the end of the centre.

Hegelians and Post-Structuralists argue it is better to take Shell's money and use it to campaign against the company. The centre's Logical Positivist directors argue that these options are irrational and that the *laissez-faire* monetarist status quo should be maintained.

A bemused Shell spokesman commented: "We don't have anything to do with the day-to-day running of the centre; all we ask is that our logo goes on their promotional literature."

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Murder inquiry at Maze

John Mullin

POLICE in Northern Ireland last weekend announced they had launched a murder investigation at the Maze prison after a former soldier charged with murdering Philip Allen and Damien Trainor at Poyntzpass, Co Armagh, was found hanged in his cell.

On Monday police arrested an inmate of the Maze in connection with the murder.

A post-mortem examination on David Keys, aged 26, an ex-member of the Royal Irish Regiment, prompted detectives to re-think their initial suspicions of suicide. He was one of four men charged with this month's killings in Poyntzpass. Prison officers found him dead in his cell last Sunday.

The revelation is certain to spark an outcry. Unionist politicians will repeat demands for the resignation of Alan Shannon, head of the prison service in Northern Ireland. Some believe the Northern Ireland Secretary, Mo Mowlam, and the security minister, Adam Ingram, should go too.

Keys had asked to go to H-Block 6, which houses around 30 prisoners belonging to the hardline Loyalist Volunteer Force. His co-accused were on the same block.

Keys was the first of the four suspects to be arrested. There were indications that he may have given evidence against his co-accused.

He had his own cell, but there is free association in the Maze. Cells are unlocked 24 hours a day, and staff rarely make checks at night.

His murder is the latest in a series of blunders at the Maze. A hard-hitting report on the escape of IRA double-murderer Liam Averill and the killing of the LVF's Billy Wright will be published this month. The Maze prison governor, Martin Mogg, has already resigned.

Even before the confirmation of murder, the Democratic Unionist party MP Peter Robinson was calling for an examination of the Maze regime. As well as the Averill escape and Wright murder, last March IRA prisoners came within 90 metres of tunnelling their way out.

Three days before the murder, Tony Blair had claimed that a Northern Ireland settlement was "agonisingly close" as Sinn Fein signalled it would be returning to the multi-party negotiations after weeks of prevarication. Mr Blair's statement followed a meeting with the Sinn Fein president, Gerry Adams, at Downing Street.

Mr Blair was "stubbornly optimistic" a political deal could be agreed as scheduled by Easter, with referendums in Northern Ireland and the Republic at the end of May.

But Ulster Unionists demanded that Sinn Fein be excluded permanently after the RUC linked the IRA with the murder of a 33-year-old Catholic man, Kevin Conway, a petty criminal, in Co Armagh last month.

The Government is likely to resist such moves. It underlined the depth of its determination to keep Sinn Fein on board when it invited Mr Adams to a St Patrick's Day lunch at the British embassy in Washington. Mr Blair also appeared to signal a switch in the Government's approach to the Mitchell principles, the rules that bind talks participants and the paramilitaries linked to them to peaceful methods. Although there was evidence of IRA involvement in the Conway murder, there was nothing to suggest it was authorised by the organisation's leadership, he said.

The Government is braced for a wave of killings over the next few months by groups trying to prevent a settlement, but Sinn Fein is expected back at Stormont next week.

Blair blocks union rights

Martin Walker in Brussels

TONY BLAIR was on a collision course with the European Commission, the Trades Union Congress and Europe's trade unions on Monday when Downing Street confirmed that it would oppose new European Union legislation to require employers to set up consultation procedures for the workforce.

The issue has caused a furore in Brussels. The Commission reacted with outrage when the EU's federation of employers refused to start negotiations with unions on the new consultation system, which would extend workers' councils and oblige employers to consult with employees before major decisions such as lay-offs.

"This is a serious setback for the social dialogue," the Commission president, Jacques Santer, said. "The future of the social dialogue must not be compromised."

The employers dug their heels in after the Confederation of British Industry assured its colleagues that Labour would turn its back on the unions and move to block any EU legislation.

"We are opposed to such an EU directive," a Downing Street spokesman said, noting that Mr Blair had already gone on record against a similar directive that would call on companies with more than 50 employees to set up consultation systems, even if it did not trade abroad. Mr Blair cited the principle of subsidiarity, which leaves to national law any matters that do not relate to Europe. The TUC said it would oppose the Government.

Brussels is furious at the British stand. It says the core tradition of the European social model is at stake — dialogue between employers and trade unions, run by the European Trade Union Confederation and Unice, the Union of Confederations of Industry and Employers.

The broader context is the coming of the single currency, which will accelerate the structural changes already under way in European industry. It is the fear of more lay-offs and job losses that has made the new consultation mechanism so important to the European unions.

Britain opted out of the EU social chapter under the Tories. But one of Labour's main election pledges was to abandon the opt-out. Britain has signed up for the only two provisions of the social chapter in force, on parental leave and the maximum length of the working week.

Aitken arrested in Yard inquiry

Jamie Wilson and David Pallister

THE disgraced former cabinet minister Jonathan Aitken was arrested on Tuesday and questioned about allegations of perjury and conspiracy to pervert the course of justice.

The development came one day after Mr Aitken's daughter, Victoria, aged 17, was arrested and questioned by officers. She was later released on police bail.

Said Ayas, aged 56, a friend and business associate of Mr Aitken, was also arrested and questioned in connection with the same allegations on Monday night. There were reports that Mr Aitken's wife, Lolicia, would have been arrested had she not been out of the country.

The interviews are part of a nine-month Scotland Yard investigation that began last June after Mr Aitken's libel action against the Guardian and Granada TV's World in Action collapsed. Evidence was produced in court that the former defence procurement minister and Chief Secretary to the Treasury had lied under oath about a weekend he spent in Paris in September 1993.

Mr Aitken's wife, his daughter and Mr Ayas all signed witness statements supporting his account.

In Brief

BRITISH prisons are controlled by drug barons, packed with the mentally ill and in chaos, according to a candid report by Sir David Ramsbotham, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

DIANE BUTLER, sentenced to life last December for stabbing her violent partner while he was attacking her, has won the right to appeal against her murder conviction.

CARDIFF has been chosen as the home of the new 60-member Welsh assembly.

THE Government tried to allay anger over the unsupervised release within two years of six violent paedophiles by suggesting that future first-time sex offenders could be detained in jail at the end of their sentences.

SCHOOLGIRL pregnancies soared by 11 per cent last year to their highest rate in more than a decade. The rise was blamed on a scare over the contraceptive pill in October 1995.

TWO Albanians confessed to murdering a British couple on the Greek island of Cephalonia. Roy and Judith Eccles were stabbed to death while they slept in their villa.

THE public inquiry into the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence was adjourned after counsel for Lawrence's parents said they wanted an urgent meeting with the Home Secretary to discuss concerns that the chairman, Sir William Macpherson, had been insensitive in handling race issues.

AGRICULTURE ministers in Brussels agreed the first step towards lifting the European Union's ban on British beef. Eleven of the 15 member states backed proposals for an easing of the ban on beef from certified herds — those with computer records.

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Disabled set to win review of benefits

David Brindle

MINISTERS plan to appease disability groups over benefit reform by announcing substantial concessions on the controversial programme of checks on disabled people's entitlement to social security.

One disability leader said last week that the Government seemed ready to look at every aspect of the programme, known as the benefit integrity project.

Ministers are determined to prevent a breakdown in relations with the disability lobby, following publication last week of highly contentious proposals by official advisers to limit sharply the payment of disability living allowance (DLA).

Disability groups have estimated that the proposals, by the DLA advisory board, could mean that only one in three of the 1.8 million recipients of the benefit would remain entitled to it. But according to the board, up to 63 per cent of current awards are based on decisions "in conflict with the facts".

The groups, which believe they are at last involved in the Government's disability benefits review after months of exclusion, are confident that the concessions will be announced at their next meeting with Harriet Harman, the Social Security Secretary, on March 30.

The project, initiated by the last government, involves the checking of some 450,000 DLA awards. At least 4,000 people have had their payments stopped or cut, although one in five of these decisions has been overturned on review.

Ms Harman is understood to have been privately critical of the handling of the project, being run by the Benefits Agency.

Although she will not agree to the disability lobby's demand to suspend the checks, she is prepared to make further changes. She has already announced that no DLA payment will be stopped or cut without seeking further evidence from a third party such as a carer or a GP.

Likely immediate concessions include an overhaul of the questionnaire and letter sent to claimants who are not visited; a speeding-up of appeals against decisions to stop or cut payments; and measures to prevent disabled drivers having to sell their specially adapted cars if they lose DLA, only to have to buy new ones if they win it back on appeal.

Bert Massie, chief executive of Radar, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation, said: "Ministers are beginning to realise this scheme is not working and that there is an atmosphere of distrust about it. We have said we want to go over every aspect of the thing, from the roots up."



One of 1,200 disabled campaigners who lobbied Parliament about benefit cuts last week PHOTO: MARTIN ARGLES

Direct action group grabs the headlines

IN AN impressive display of solidarity, more than 1,200 disabled people converged on the House of Commons to lobby MPs last week, voicing their anxiety about feared cuts to their benefits, *writes Amelia Gentleman*. But that public show of anger was barely noticed beyond Westminster.

Another demonstration over precisely the same issues, staged just a few months ago at Downing Street, attracted a mere 20 disabled campaigners. Yet pictures of it made the front pages of newspapers throughout Europe and the United States.

The difference? The active involvement of the Disabled People's Direct Action Network (DAN), an organisation that has fought hard to change the face of disability activism.

One of the network's founders, Alan Holdsworth, knows just how to use shock tactics to push disability issues to the heart of the political arena. The action outside No 10, where protesters abandoned their wheelchairs and lay on the pavement in pools of blood-red paint, was carefully planned.

And it worked. Disability was back on to the agenda and Tony Blair discussed it on that evening's news.

Lord Ashley, chairman of the All-Party Disablement Group, commented that the Government was making militants out of the disabled. Mr Holdsworth replied: "I don't know what's militant about wanting to get on a bus."

Prescott hits back at personal attack on son

Peter Hetherington

JOHN PRESCOTT turned the heat on Labour rebels in Hull last week after Department of the Environment auditors found no irregularity in the sale of 25 former council houses to a company employing his son, Jonathan.

Clearly agitated by personal attacks by party dissidents in the city, the Deputy Prime Minister vented his fury on long-standing enemies and came close to accusing them of having a hidden agenda. "Perhaps they could now have the decency to apologise," he said.

Mr Prescott, who heads the Department of the Environment — which has overall responsibility for local government and housing— ordered the auditors' inquiry into the disputed sale last week, following a leak inspired by two Hull men who claimed to be researchers. They were subsequently interviewed by police at their own request.

The auditors' report followed allegations that the houses were sold at a knock down price of just over £5,000 each, when, critics claimed they were worth £20,000.

But their report said: "Nothing we saw . . . leads us to conclude other than that the sale was handled with full regard to the requirements of regularity and propriety."

With 2,000 houses under its wing, the North Hull Housing Action Trust, at the centre of the row, was one of seven quangos created by the last government to renovate run down estates. The vice chairman of the trust is John Black, a Labour power-broker in Hull and long-standing friend of John Prescott, who is now suspended from the Labour group on the city council.

The 25 houses were from a block of 50 earmarked for sale at between £15,000 and £17,000 to so-called "homesteaders" — DIY enthusiasts offered the chance of improving properties that often need substantial internal renovation.

Mr Prescott said: "This is an independent auditors report by auditors accountable to Parliament . . . so there is no doubt they have done a thorough report. A satisfactory price was achieved for the taxpayer and ministers were not involved in the transaction."

Germans demand trial

Ian Traynor in Bonn and Owen Bowcott

GERMAN prosecutors last week demanded that Roisin McAliskey be tried in Britain for an IRA mortar attack in Osnabruck as her supporters claimed she had contracted brittle bone disease after 15 months in jail and may never fully recover her health.

The collapse of the 18 month investigation into Ms McAliskey's alleged role in the 1996 IRA attack on a British army base in northern Germany disappointed federal prosecutors in Karlsruhe.

"We are requesting that the British take over the prosecution," said Eva Schuebel, spokeswoman for the Karlsruhe office.

The prosecutors' insistence that Ms McAliskey not be allowed to go free, however, contrasted with the view of the government in Bonn, which appeared happy to close the book on the IRA case.

Bernhard Boehm, of the justice ministry, signalled German acceptance of the ruling by the UK Home Secretary, Jack Straw, and indicated that Bonn would not be pursuing the matter: "The case is now closed because the British decision is final."

Germany refuses to extradite its own nationals for trial abroad, insisting on trying suspects at home. That stance infuriated the Irish Republic, which refuses to extradite suspects to Germany on the grounds of lack of reciprocity.

Ms McAliskey is undergoing treatment at the Maudsley psychiatric hospital in London, with her daughter, Loinnir, who was born last May.

Anti-hunting MPs fight on

ANTI-HUNTING MPs last week promised to continue bringing legislation to ban fox-hunting before Parliament until they overcome the Tory-led guerrilla forces that killed Mike Foster's bill, *writes Michael White*.

After filibustering had blocked decisive progress for the second successive Friday, Mr Foster insisted that his bill was "alive and kicking" and would be back in the legislative queue on Friday, with its impassioned supporters.

But there are four other private member's bills to get their Commons third reading. And pro-hunting MPs promised to "talk it out" again, as they did last week.

Spartan sisters take on unconvincing Ethics Man

SKETCH
Simon Hoggart

YEARS ago it was commonly said, by women at least, that if women ruled the world there would be no wars. No woman would ever vote for babies being bombed.

Then along came Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher, who put a stop to that line of thought. But their terms of office covered the rise of feminism, which produced subtler arguments. One was that men were the violent but essentially innocent victims of testosterone poisoning.

Maybe — though it was the women of Sparta who told their men to return from battle either victorious or dead. And it was Ann Winterton (Conservative, Congleton) who stood up quivering before Mo Mowlam last week, as passionate with rage and fury as any Ian Paisley, to denounce the peace process in Northern Ireland.

"The Unionist community must feel they have been betrayed and devastated! The peace process has been hijacked by Sinn Fein/IRA and now could only be correctly described as [much-needed pause for breath] the appeasement process!"

Moments later, Marion Roe (C, Broxbourne) was on her feet snarling about Roisin McAliskey not being sent off to Germany to face trial. The sisters in the Broxbourne and Congleton chapters of Scum (Society for Cutting Up Men) would have had much to chew on there.

Mrs Roe's contribution started a shaky Prime Minister's Question Time for Tony Blair. William Hague scored over Britain's failure to sign a United Nations resolution condemning China over human rights. The decision has been described by Wei Jingsheng, China's best known dissident, as "stupefying".

"The Foreign Secretary," said Mr Hague, "poses unconvincingly as Ethics Man. But the first time the Ethical Foreign Policy is put to the test, there is no trace of it."

Mr Blair provided no reason for this surprising decision, beyond saying: "We did not think, in the circumstances, that it was the right thing to do" — a meaningless formulation which he later called "the reasons I have given". ("Why did you nick the money, Biggsy?" "I thought it was the right thing to do." "But *why?*" "For the reasons I have given.")

Paddy Ashdown tried to persuade him that Parliament was the guarantor of standards at Times newspapers, and in particular their coverage of China. He did not say, though it hung in the air like the fumes from an opium pipe, that this might be one more example of Mr Blair's kowtowing to the gerontocratic tyrant, Rupert Murdoch.

Then just as Mr Blair might have felt all hope was lost, along came Dr Julian Lewis.

Dr Lewis is a collector of facts, and he poured out a shoebox full. Rape victims in psychiatric hospitals! Sean Connery's knighthood! And worst of all, the honour for "Eric Hobsbawm, a lifelong communist who *just happens* to be the father of the business partner of the girlfriend of the Chancellor of the Exchequer!"

Dr Lewis (he is not a real doctor, ie, a spin doctor, but the academic type) looked pained by the hilarity this revelation occasioned.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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BSE costs 'exaggerated'

Paul Brown

THE BSE crisis was not nearly as disastrous for Britain as originally predicted, with some farmers gaining and new jobs being created, according to a government-funded report published last week.

Although the cost for the first 12 months was between £740 million and £980 million, the effect was mitigated on individual farms and businesses by government subsidies and compensation. These figures, for the first year after the probable link between BSE and new variant CJD was announced, are well below those used by ministers at the time.

The prediction of 46,000 jobs going was well off the mark, with only 1,000 net losses in the first 12 months, the report, commissioned by the Treasury and the Ministry of Agriculture, says.

Beef sales dropped 36 per cent, but as a result of the increase in sales of other meat products — poultry, lamb and pork — plus subsidies to offset the BSE crisis, net farm income increased in 1996 compared with 1995.

Abattoirs were badly hit but compensation payments and a fall in cattle prices actually helped lift profit margins. In the regulation sector an extra 300 to 500 jobs were created for inspectors and related posts.

The biggest losers were in Northern Ireland, followed by Scotland, and parts of northern and southwest England. In eastern counties of England and lowland areas, where pig and poultry farming are important, farmers gained, while their counterparts in the upland and western areas lost out.

The report says: "The BSE crisis occurred against a backdrop of existing changes in the industry and broader economy: falling demand for beef; overcapacity in sections of the industry; increasing pressure to improve hygiene, and the strong appreciation of sterling, which makes disentangling the precise impact of the BSE crisis difficult."

It says that in the first year the £1.5 billion of subsidy and compensation payments to farmers, abattoirs and other food businesses did "largely compensate" for the loss of output, but it warns that once those subsidies are removed this year, the hardship will increase.

● The ban on sales of beef on the bone faces legal challenge after a hotelier last week won the first hurdle in his battle to have the new regulations ruled illegal by the courts.

Lawyers acting for James Sutherland, the first person to be prosecuted under the ban, won the right to a preliminary hearing into the legality of the regulations. It will take place next month.

Inquiry hears of victim's plight

CLARE TOMKINS enjoyed life to the full, loved animals, was looking forward to getting married and had been a strict vegetarian since the age of 13, *writes Owen Bowcott*.

But over the course of six months she degenerated into a tormented patient racked by spasmodic head movements, whose hands and feet turned inward. She could not walk unaided, cowered in fear from members of her family and "howled like a sick, injured animal".

Last week her father, Roger Tomkins, described in harrowing detail the agonies endured by his terminally ill daughter and the effect her wasting condition is having on the family's life.

Relatives of other victims wept as the BSE inquiry listened in hushed silence to Mr Tomkins, an engineering company director, recalled how Clare gradually succumbed to the human equivalent of the disease, new variant CJD. Clare, now aged 24, is bedbound, doubly incontinent, and requires round-the-clock nursing and an automatic pump to clear accumulating saliva.

Treatment at several hospitals, involving being sectioned under the Mental Health Act and electro-convulsive therapy, followed before she was referred to St Mary's Hospital in London and diagnosed in August 1997.

Blair appoints key bishops

Madeleine Bunting

AN OUTSPOKEN advocate of family values was appointed Bishop of Liverpool last week. The evangelical and media-friendly Right Rev James Jones, Bishop of Hull, will succeed the Right Rev David Sheppard in one of the highest-profile jobs in the Church of England.

Bishop Jones signals the kind of plans New Labour may have in mind for a more dynamic and vigorous leadership of the Church of England. But he was the only church leader to speak publicly criticising the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, over taking his partner abroad on work trips. "The private life has a bearing on public office. An invitation to vote is an invitation to trust — character is relevant. This is a principle of public governance," he insisted last week.

Bishop Jones has been widely seen as being on a fast track: he was appointed to Hull as a suffragan bishop at 45, only 11 years after he had been ordained as priest. The 3½ years in Hull have given him experience of working in an economically deprived port city where he has been closely involved in economic regeneration, which will prove valuable in Liverpool.

Tony Blair will further stamp his authority on the Church of England with the appointment of a Labour-supporting bishop to the diocese of Southwark in London.

Dr Tom Butler, Bishop of Leicester, is expected to be named this week as head of the third-largest Anglican diocese in the country. Dr Butler is from the same liberal Catholic wing of the Church as the Prime Minister.

Europe's new vision

THE EUROPEAN conference held last week in London was *not about Turkey*. Our italics reflect the emphasis placed on the point by the British hosts — to an extent where unkind minds might suspect them of pleading too much. The UK foreign minister for Europe, Doug Henderson, may have said last year that "joining this Europe conference is a plum for them [the Turkish government], which opens the way for other plums down the line". But that was before the Luxembourg European Council decided that Turkey did not make the grade for starting accession negotiations for an enlarged European Union, unlike the 10 central and east European countries now on the starting line. (Cyprus is there too — and that is part of the problem). It was too bitter a plum for Turkey to swallow, but that makes *no difference at all*.

Yet though Ankara's ghost lurked in the shadows of the banquet, the insistence of the British Prime Minister that this is an historic event may be more than compensatory rhetoric. We should acknowledge the potential appeal of an expanded Europe which, in embryonic form, the conference symbolises. The British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, speaks of bridging the wealth divide that remained — indeed was accentuated — when the divisions of the cold war were finally overcome. It is impossible, he argues, for the EU to be a "fortress of wealthy countries with the poor at its gate". If an enlarged Europe can generate real transfers of wealth to the east, it will both meet the demands of social justice and reduce the threat of conflict on Europe's periphery.

The reality of Kosovo today may seem to mock these early efforts, but some form of pan-European association, which might eventually cover all of the southern Balkans, is one way to make more Kosovos less likely. A hugely enlarged Europe could also mean the evolution of a concept of European co-operation with very different dynamics. The current British gloss of more pluralist influence for smaller nations may or may not be seriously meant, but it is certainly an ideal worth striving for.

But nothing has a chance if the whole effort, due to begin on March 31, is wrecked before it starts by the interrelated problems of excluded Turkey, full-member Greece, and applicant Cyprus. Turkey was clearly ruled out from joining the first tranche of applicants by its poor record on human rights and slow pace of political and economic reform. Yet it is important not to blur the issue by suspicions of ethnic or religious lines being drawn, or to allow Greece to exercise a veto. Ways have to be found to give more substance to relations with Turkey beyond the promised "intensification" of a customs union. On Cyprus, the (till now lukewarm) invitation to Turkish Cypriots to join a joint negotiating team is meaningless unless wider inter-communal problems — including Nicosia's planned missile purchase — can be successfully tackled. If it is impossible to freeze the negotiations on the admission of Cyprus, then these should be placed on the slowest possible track. Putting behind the old scars of Europe will not be achieved by deepening current wounds.

A cabinet of Suharto's chums

ASIA IS no exception to the global risk of instability. This lesson, long denied while its "economic miracle" was soaring, is underlined by two stories high on the bad news list last weekend. The plight of North Korea's refugees should come as no surprise after three years of crisis. But the bizarre make-up of the new Indonesian cabinet *would barely have been noticed a year ago when Jakarta was being praised for its feverish economic growth. Now it is different: when the world's financial community fears it may suffer, the time has come for censure.*

If Indonesia should implode, the name of Mohammad Hasan, the new minister of trade and industry, will be inscribed high on the roll of folly. "Bob" Hasan is an old chum and golfing partner of President Suharto who evokes the shady world of cronyism. The only issue is whether his name should come before that of the new minister for social welfare — the president's daughter, "Tutu" Rukmana. Hasan is also directly linked to the country's environmental disaster, as one of the biggest tycoons of the timber industry that has fanned the fires by burning off unwanted growth and clearing the land for pulp plantations. Last August, just one month before the smoke haze began to blanket neighbouring countries, Suharto ceremonially opened a new $900 million wood-pulp mill in East Kalimantan on behalf of Hasan's timber company. East Kalimantan has been burning ever since.

The threat that North Korea's crisis poses to stability in East Asia is real but hard to measure. One day Pyongyang announces wartime mobilisation — although it is linked to annual military exercises — and the next, its diplomats arrive in Geneva in peaceful mood for talks with the United States, China and South Korea. The tales of hardship brought out by refugees indicate something approaching famine and a breakdown of order, rather than acute deprivation in a society still continuing to function, which international aid agencies have reported. The emergence of a new government in South Korea may offer some hope for better relations. But one has to ask how far rational calculation is possible under a one-man hegemony and an overpowering personality cult in the North.

The North Korean question should be posed in Jakarta too. Can Indonesia be expected to behave rationally under the cult of Suharto — and is the stability of Southeast Asia also at risk? The Japanese prime minister is the latest of a string of visitors to beg Suharto to heed the advice of the International Monetary Fund and dismantle the profligate monopolies held by his family and friends. The new cabinet makes the prospect even less likely. The IMF may not have a brilliant track record, but its prescription would be vastly preferable for most Indonesians to a corrupt autarchy masquerading as patriotic autonomy.

Suharto and his loyal central bank are now playing the card of national sovereignty to present Indonesia as the innocent victim of foreign meddling. The question is not just whether the IMF will be able to stage a further rescue, but whether it should even attempt to do so. Indonesia does have one advantage over North Korea: its students are at last on the move and public opinion can no longer be taken for granted. It might be more sensible to stand aside and leave the Suharto regime to its uncertain fate.

Getting a grip on PC pronouns

WE SHOULDN'T laugh too loudly at the plight of politicians in France as they grapple with the grammar of political correctness. The Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, has ruled (as a contribution to this month's International Women's Day) that in future women in government should be called Madame *la* ministre. This gesture has inevitably incurred the wrath of the Académie Française, which guards the traditions of French grammar, including the gender of nouns, like a linguistic Rottweiler. We shouldn't laugh because Britain has problems of her/its/his/their own. Although the process of linguistic evolution has enabled English to shed many of its Latinate genders, it still finds itself unable to cope with certain situations where the pronoun insists on being given a sex. "Everyone should do his bit" is no longer acceptable but to substitute "her" or "its" or even "their" creates a counterbalancing confusion. We certainly need a new word. That's the easy bit. But what should it be?

It was comparatively easy to force the pace of evolution by coining "chairperson" or "chair" to oust "chairman" from its sexist perch. And "mankind" is gradually being replaced by "humankind" (which, although it still contains the misleading word "man", is sort of ambushed by the letters around it). Thousands of new words have been created in recent years. Most of the time the new words are generated in response to market pressures. Except in one case. Inventing a non-gender specific pronoun to embrace men and women has so far proved elusive. The obvious solution would be to take one letter from "his" and insert it in "her" (or vice versa) to produce "hir". It doesn't sound right — but nor, presumably, did the word "his" when it was first uttered. Maybe a tiny tranche of millennium money should be set aside for the deviser of the best solution. Are there any suggestions out there?

Give us this day our daily toxic bread

Plans in the US to banish genuine organic produce could lead to the same thing happening in Britain, writes **George Monbiot**



OPRAH WINFREY is an unlikely hero of the battle against big business. Yet the case she won this month, in which she established her right to express an opinion about the merits of eating beefburgers, ranks with the McDonald's libel trial as one of the few serious setbacks suffered by the agro-industrial combines seeking to monopolise world food production.

She had been sued by a syndicate of monster cattle ranchers under the surreal "food disparagement" laws introduced in 14 American states to prevent people from questioning such practices as feeding bovine offal to cows.

These laws are a compelling demonstration of the lengths to which United States legislators will go to defend the interests of corporations against the interests of the citizen. The British can only be thankful that there's an ocean between them and US plutocracy.

The happy state won't last, however. Winfrey might have won her battle, but the war waged by an industry that can tolerate no dissent has only just begun. Its latest attempt to silence criticism and eliminate good practice is already well-advanced, and this time the consequences for Britain are just as profound as the consequences for the US.

This week the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) was expected to close its consultations on a new national standard for organic farming. Its proposals have horrified small farmers, consumer groups and animal welfare campaigners. If adopted and implemented as protesters predict, they will outlaw genuine organic production all over the world.

The USDA would allow fruit and vegetables to be labelled "organic" in the US that have been genetically engineered, irradiated, treated with additives and raised on contaminated sewage sludge. Under the new proposals, "organic" livestock can be housed in batteries, fed with the offal of other animals and injected with biotics. "Organic" produce, in the brave new world of US oligopoly, will be virtually indistinguishable from conventionally toxic food.

The solution would seem to be obvious: genuine organic producers should call their food something else. But the USDA is nothing if not far-sighted. The new proposals prohibit the setting of standards higher than those established by the department. Farmers will, in other words, be forbidden by law from producing and selling good food.

The next step, if these standards are adopted in the US, is not hard to anticipate. American manufacturers will complain to their government that the European Union is erecting unfair barriers to trade, by refusing to allow them to label the poisonous produce they sell in Europe as organic food.

The US government will take the case to the World Trade Organisation. The WTO will refer it to Codex Alimentarius, the food standards body dominated by corporate scientists. The Codex panel will decide that they cannot see any difference between US organic produce and European organic produce, and the WTO will threaten Europe with punitive sanctions if it continues to maintain the higher trading standard. This is precisely the means by which European consumers are being forced to eat beef and drink milk contaminated with injectable growth hormones.

There's no mystery about why US agribusiness wants its Washington subsidiary, the USDA, to set these new standards. The consumption of organic food is rising by 20-30 per cent a year and, in some countries, is likely to become the dominant land use. Organic farming is labour intensive. It responds best to small-scale production, matched to the peculiarities of the land.

Big business simply can't operate in an environment like this. There is no potential for hegemony. What it can't control, it must destroy.

The US government claims to be the champion of free trade, but it is, in truth, emphatically opposed to it. It seeks instead to exercise a coercive power of central control and legislative diktat on a scale that makes the command economies of the old Soviet Union look like a village paper-round.

I have long believed that non-US citizens should be allowed to vote in US elections, as their outcome affects us almost as much as it affects the Americans.

British people now have a brief opportunity to do the next best thing and demand of the USDA that it drops this attempt to smother the seeds of rehabilitation. There are no second chances. Once the new standards come into force, the British government will be powerless to protect its own citizens from the consequences.

Picking up the tab for past policy blunders

From rail privatisation to BSE, Labour has inherited a nightmare. **Larry Elliott** and **Mark Atkinson** spell out the cost implications

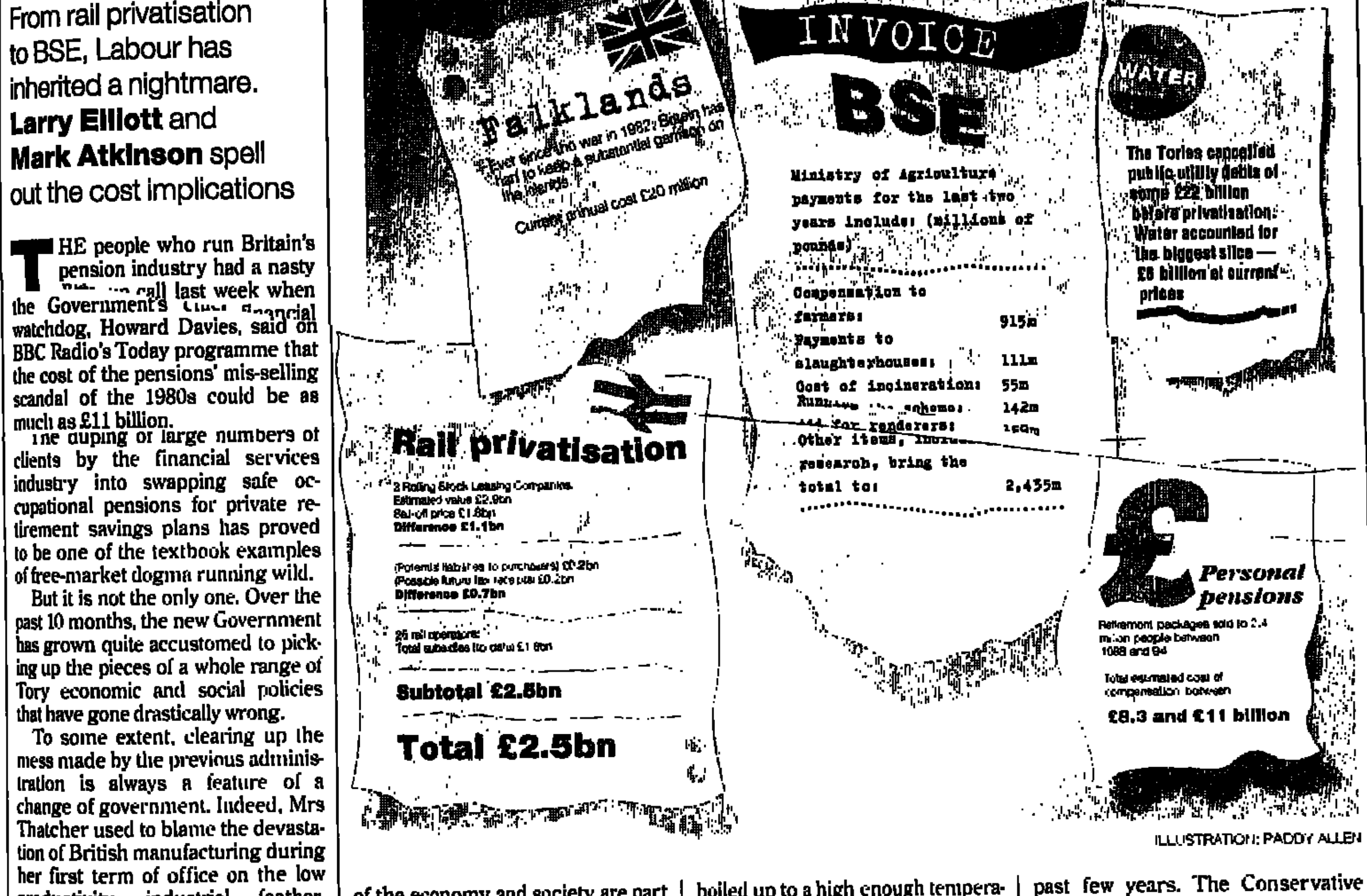


ILLUSTRATION: PADDY ALLEN

THE people who run Britain's pension industry had a nasty [illegible] call last week when the Government's chief financial watchdog, Howard Davies, said on BBC Radio's Today programme that the cost of the pensions' mis-selling scandal of the 1980s could be as much as £11 billion.

The duping of large numbers of clients by the financial services industry into swapping safe occupational pensions for private retirement savings plans has proved to be one of the textbook examples of free-market dogma running wild.

But it is not the only one. Over the past 10 months, the new Government has grown quite accustomed to picking up the pieces of a whole range of Tory economic and social policies that have gone drastically wrong.

To some extent, clearing up the mess made by the previous administration is always a feature of a change of government. Indeed, Mrs Thatcher used to blame the devastation of British manufacturing during her first term of office on the low productivity, industrial featherbedding, and high inflation inherited from Labour in 1979.

But the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and his ministers seem to have been left with a particularly difficult legacy, in part because the sheer longevity of the previous regime gave it time to treat Britain as a laboratory for a free-market experiment in which deregulation, privatisation, cutting red tape, downsizing the public sector and reducing state spending were seen as the way to putting the country on the path to higher growth and prosperity.

Britain is still waiting to see the economic benefits of *laissez-faire* economics. Growth has not been faster than it was in what the Thatcherites dubbed the bad old days of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s; it has been slower. Living standards have risen more slowly, and the fruits of growth have been spread more unevenly.

However, it is now clear that, far from being part of the solution to Britain's problem, the marketisation of the economy and society are part of the problem.

The pension's mis-selling is a case in point. The dogmatic belief that the private sector would always be more efficient led the government to offer employees tax breaks to switch out of occupational and state-run pension schemes.

This was just the signal the financial services industry — already swelled in size by the end of capital controls — needed to embark on a drive for new customers that all-too-often crossed the dividing line between entrepreneurial zeal and downright dishonesty.

The BSE debacle is another example of a slow-burn policy error that Labour is having to tackle. At the heart of Conservative doctrine was the belief that red tape should be cut and industry allowed, wherever possible, to regulate itself. So, despite repeated warnings from health experts, the food industry was allowed to feed the remains of dead animals to cattle without being boiled up to a high enough temperature to kill off the disease.

Conservatives reacted angrily when the Prime Minister said that the they had been responsible for giving Britain BSE. But, to a large extent that is true. There were fatal delays in making mad cow a notifiable disease, removing beef offal from baby food and from sausage, burgers and pies. Had the Government listened to criticism and set up an independent Food Standards Authority, rather than leaving the Ministry of Agriculture to represent the often conflicting interests of consumers and producers, lives might have been saved.

Certainly, large sums of money would have been. John Major's administration picked up a bill for £1.5 billion in its last year in office, but Labour will have to pay compensation to farmers of £930 million this year, £563 million next and £488 million in 1999-2000.

Some of the gloss has also come off the privatisation miracle over the past few years. The Conservative argument is that previously nationalised industries were made more efficient by being sold off, and that instead of being a drain on the public purse they started to pay large sums of corporation tax into Treasury coffers. One study published last year by the rightwing think-tank Centre for Policy Studies said that the Treasury received £8.8 billion in corporation tax and dividends together with privatisation proceeds between 1988 and 1995. The study claimed that prices of gas had fallen by 50 per cent in real terms since the industry was sold off in 1986, Telecom charges by 40 per cent and electricity by 2 to 2.5 per cent a year.

The counter argument is that the successes of these industries were caused by other factors, such as increased competition, for which privatisation is not strictly necessary.

Moreover, the privatisation of the railways has not led to any savings to the state at all. Before privatisation, it was subsidised by £900 million a year; now the handout to keep the trains running is £2 billion, although the figure is falling. Additionally, it is plain that the assets were sold off at a bargain basement price. British Rail valued the track and stations that were floated on the stock exchange in May 1996 at £6.4 billion; they were sold for £1.8 billion. Shares in the private company created — Railtrack — opened at 190 pence; they are now worth around £10.

Of course, Labour has not had to clear up every problem created by the Conservatives. Some they had to cope with themselves, and even turned to their own advantage. Take the Falklands war in 1982, which symbolised Mrs Thatcher's tough approach to putting Britain back on the map after decades of decline.

However, the whole episode could have been averted had it not been for the then government's penny-pinching approach to public spending. Under Thatcher's lash John Nott, then Defence Secretary, cut the defence budget, including an obscure warship called HMS Endurance, which acted as a "tripwire" against renewed Argentine attacks on the "Malvinas". A saving of £6 million a year was at stake. But the military regime in Buenos Aires saw it as a green light to regain "lost" territory over which negotiations for shared sovereignty had stalled.

The ensuing conflict, won against the odds, cost Britain at least £1 billion — plus hundreds dead — and still costs some £20 million a year to maintain the garrison.

The Tories were not so lucky with the housing market. Mrs Thatcher's grand vision of a home-owning democracy, brought into being by generous tax breaks for owner occupation and the sale of council houses, was highly popular at the outset, but turned into a nightmare for thousands of victims of negative equity when boom turned to bust.

Financially, the cost to the state of selling off council houses and subsidising private-sector rents has been an explosive increase in housing benefit and council tax benefit bills — from £3.4 billion in 1979-80 to £14 billion in 1996-97. That's a mess that Labour will have to clear up.

But politically, the free-market experiment has backfired. The call for tighter regulation of the market and the price that is still being paid resulted in last year's electoral wipeout of the Conservatives and may keep them in opposition for some time.

Indian addiction

The tobacco companies are waging war on a nation. **Jenny Barraclough** visits the casualties

THE giant tobacco firm BAT recently upset health campaigners by its belligerent PR tactics in advance of Britain's No-Smoking Day last week. But the British event is in reality a bit of an irrelevance. The real battle is taking place in the Third World.

India, for example, is already addicted to tobacco in non-Western ways. At the Tata Memorial Hospital in Bombay, bed after bed contains patients with an array of visually shocking cancers of the mouth and neck. Many have tubes of flesh connecting their chest with their faces, where the removal of the tumour has left a hole. There I saw Dr Pradham, an Edinburgh-trained surgeon, operating on a beautiful 20-year-old boy. His face was distorted by a massive tumour. He'd been chewing "pan", a mixture of tobacco, betel nut and lime, since he was 10 and sleeps with it in his mouth. He has his lower jaw and cheek and half his mouth cut away. The cheek is replaced by a piece of his chest, and the top of his mouth is stretched around to replace the missing half of the bottom lip. He will never be beautiful again.

The next operation is on a middle-aged man who has smoked *bidis* (cheap, small roll-ups with raw tobacco wrapped inside a leaf) all his life. He has cancer in his larynx and lymph nodes. The opened-up neck is a maze of veins, arteries and nerves. Dr Pradham, his knife skirting carefully around what looks like a tiny piece of taut red cotton, explains: "We make every effort to save this nerve because it supplies the muscle for the shoulder. Most of our patients are labourers and they must be able to carry weight."

At least 50,000 people have their larynx removed like this each year in India. Ninety-five per cent of such cancers are caused by tobacco. Into this tobacco-loving society is being introduced a yet more insidious threat. Western firms such as BAT want to get these millions of people addicted to manufactured cigarettes; and to seduce the young.

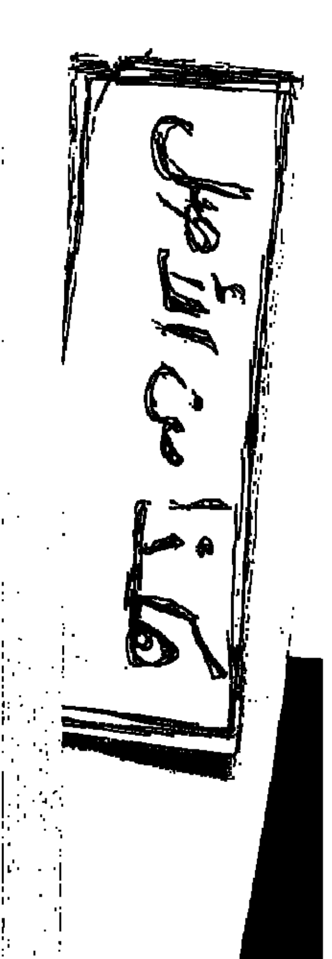
BAT, for example, owns 32 per cent of the Indian Tobacco Company, which controls 64 per cent of the cigarette market. The better-off poor are being weaned off their "pan" and their little roll-up bidis on to "proper" cigarettes. (Cigarettes are only 18 per cent of Indian tobacco consumption.) They had to be cheap to compete with the bidi. So a mini cigarette was introduced.

But, as the commercials director Pralad Kakkar explains: "Who wants to smoke a small cigarette which might be compared with his sexual performance?" He was brought in to make a film that would persuade Indian men that "Heroes", although small, would enhance their masculinity. His commercial used a famous and sexy star of a current box-office hit to beat up all the men and get all the girls, while smoking very small Heroes. Sales went up from 0.6 billion cigarettes in 1994-5 to 18 billion by 1996.

And the big challenge is to capture the very young. Cricket is a national obsession, played by children from six upwards on any available clearing. Wills Tobacco, another ITC brand, paid more than $16 million to have the recent Cricket World Cup renamed after Wills, with the company's logo on the players' outfits.

One survey of 5,000 14-year-old Goan schoolchildren subsequently found that 8 per cent of those who watched the Cricket World Cup on television experimented with cigarettes afterwards, and 16 per cent thought you became a better cricketer if you smoked Wills.

Half India's population is under 20. Tobacco companies are trying to make up for lost sales in the West by pushing into the developing countries. They have already made huge gains in Burma, Taiwan, South Korea and Malaysia. Now, in India, they are trying to crack one of the biggest markets in the world.



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Brown to keep a tight rein

Mark Atkinson and
Charlotte Denny

THE Chancellor, Gordon Brown, was expected to maintain a tight grip on Britain's public spending in Tuesday's Budget, with only minimal extra cash for priority areas, despite unveiling a sharp improvement in the public finances.

Mr Brown was expected to reduce his public borrowing forecast for the current financial year to around half the present level of $15.8 billion, fuelling accusations that he is sitting on a pre-election war chest.

The improvement in the public finances this year is largely due to one-off factors, such as unexpectedly low borrowing by local authorities and public corporations. Mr Brown is determined not to be diverted from implementing his tough five-year deficit reduction plan, designed to put the public finances on a sustainable long-term footing.

His forecasts for public borrowing in future years were expected to remain more or less unchanged from November's pre-Budget report, which predicted a small surplus by the turn of the century.

Although substantial extra cash is likely to be found in the summer for education and health by switching money from other programmes, overall expenditure controls will remain stringent because of the need to reduce the national debt, which eats up more than $40 billion a year in interest payments.

The Chancellor was expected to reduce his GDP forecast for this year, from a range of 2.25-2.75 per cent to 2-2.5 per cent. The range reflects uncertainty about the impact of the Asian financial crisis on British exports and business confidence, as well as the improvement in the economy's performance that may result from the welfare to work programme.

Mr Brown is also still concerned about the dangers of an explosion in pay, which could force the Bank of England to increase interest rates again to restrain inflation. Higher interest rates would slow economic growth.

Mr Brown is expected to reduce his forecast for inflation this year, from 3 per cent to about 2.75 per cent, again reflecting the deflationary impact of Asia.

Meanwhile the latest [illegible] figures showed the economy expanded by 0.6 per cent in the last quarter of 1997, 0.2 percentage points above government statisticians' first estimate. The revision brings annual growth up to 2.9 per cent.

● The Chancellor on Monday outlined tough new curbs to prevent governments using tax cuts or pre-election spending sprees to buy votes when he published a hardline Code for Fiscal Stablity.

Labour's code will include a commitment to borrow only for investment and to hold the stock of national debt stable as a proportion of national income over the economic cycle.

For details of the Budget, visit the Guardian website: www.guardian.co.uk/budget98



In Brief

DRUGS producer Glaxo Wellcome is understood to be encouraging leading City shareholders to seek the scalp of SmithKline Beecham's chief executive, Jan Leschly, in order to clear the way for a revival of a $160 billion merger of the two groups, which collapsed amid rumours of a personality clash between Mr Leschly and Glaxo head Sir Richard Sykes.

BRITAIN and Sweden were left on the sidelines of the European monetary system when Greece took the drachma back in to the exchange rate mechanism, a significant step towards joining the single currency in 2001. The price was a 14 per cent devaluation against a basket of European currencies.

UK INSURERS and financial advisers face a bill for personal pensions mis-selling of up to $18 billion, almost three times the original estimate, and the number of victims could be as high as 2.4 million, according to figures released by The Financial Services Authority.

MILLIONS of dollars worth of mineral assets changed hands as Lonrho announced a share and asset swap that will give it control of both South Africa's Tavistock coal group and about a fifth of its own equity. The exercise leaves Lonrho a leading coal producer.

A NEAR-$330 million package to buy off holders of bonds issued by the collapsed Barings merchant bank was unveiled. The cash on offer includes substantial contributions from Dutch group ING, the new owner of Barings, and accountants Coopers & Lybrand, the former Barings auditors.

SEGA, the Japanese computer games giant, acknowledged for the first time the scale of the defeat it has suffered at the hands of Sony and Nintendo when it disclosed that its games division had racked up losses of $360 million following a bitter battle in a market estimated to be worth more than $15 billion.

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates March 16	Sterling rates March 9
Australia	2.4871-2.4916	2.4529-2.4563
Austria	21.32-21.34	21.02-21.04
Belgium	62.52-62.58	61.63-61.73
Canada	2.3530-2.3552	2.3125-2.3147
Denmark	11.55-11.56	11.39-11.40
France	10.16-10.17	10.02-10.03
Germany	3.0313-3.0336	2.9887-2.9913
Hong Kong	12.89-12.90	12.63-12.67
Ireland	1.2081-1.2104	1.2033-1.2058
Italy	2,984-2,987	2,940-2,942
Japan	215.81-216.06	208.89-209.18
Netherlands	3.4168-3.4194	3.3679-3.3710
New Zealand	2.8610-2.8658	2.8226-2.8279
Norway	12.63-12.64	12.43-12.44
Portugal	310.29-310.60	305.87-306.02
Spain	257.14-257.31	253.16-253.43
Sweden	13.21-13.23	13.09-13.11
Switzerland	2.4643-2.4672	2.4529-2.4583
USA	1.6651-1.6659	1.6361-1.6371
ECU	1.5278-1.5295	1.5100-1.5119

FTSE100 Share Index down 33.9 at 5786.1. FTSE 250 Index up 109.9 at 5387.9. Gold up $0.65 at $294.50.

PC sales boom loses its byte

Alexander Garrett
finds key players in the computer industry suffering from a rare bout of market insecurity

WHEN Intel, the world's biggest semiconductor maker, announced that its profits would fall in the first quarter of the year, the computer industry shivered.

When the world's biggest PC company, Compaq, reported days later that its first quarter sales would be back at 1997 levels and that it expected barely to break even during the first quarter of this year, alarm bells rang. Each company claimed its setback was temporary, caused by special circumstances.

The fear, though, is that the seemingly limitless boom that the PC market has been enjoying over the past few years could be at an end, and that the bulletins from Intel and Compaq earlier this month are the harbingers of a spate of bad news to come from the industry.

The stakes are high — especially in the United States. An American Electronics Association study last November concluded that information technology had become the largest-selling industry in the US, accounting for about 6.2 per cent of gross domestic product. It is the biggest manufacturing employer, with work for 4.3 million people, and its growth created 250,000 jobs in 1995-96 alone.

Technology is taking an increasingly dominant position in the US stock markets. Microsoft is poised to overtake General Electric as the world's biggest company in stock market valuation, with Intel not far behind. A serious downturn in the PC market could be enough to trigger a crash on Wall Street.

Steve Brazier, a PC analyst with UK research company Dataquest, says: "We used to say that the PC market was driven by economic fundamentals. Now we tend to say that the economy is driven by PC market fundamentals."

And Mike Bourne, manager of the Finsbury Technology Trust, argues: "Inflation is low worldwide because of the implementation of technology." The reason, he says, is that the productivity benefits have cut wage inflation and fostered efficient pricing.

There have been a number of recent indications that life has been proving tough for PC manufacturers. In Europe, a number of Asian-owned companies have been pulling back from the mainstream PC market, either refocusing on portables or withdrawing altogether. They include ICL, owned by Fujitsu, AST, part of Samsung, and Mitsubishi-owned Apricot. Germany's Escom failed. US companies, meanwhile, have been ruthlessly cutting their prices. One IBM executive declared recently: "We're virtually giving away PCs."

And Compaq's recently announced merger with Digital Equipment, presented as a move into the more lucrative area of computer services, was seen by some as an acknowledgement that margins will only get tighter.

Yet industry watchers argue that Compaq's and Intel's problems do not signal an industry-wide downturn.

Brazier says there has been a fall in demand in Asia and Japan, but Europe is extremely buoyant. The big question mark is over the US.

Compaq's problems have been blamed by some on "channel stuffing" — pushing too much stock into the arms of distributors during the fourth quarter of 1997 in the expectation of continued sales growth that failed to materialise. The firm's financial year ends in December, and it may have wanted to put the best gloss on its results.

Intel, say analysts, failed to make its new top-range Pentium II processors available either on server or notebook computers. It has also fallen prey to the new "sub-$1,000" segment of the PC market, which accounted for 25 per cent of US home computer sales last year, up from 7 per cent in 1996. In this market, Intel's stranglehold has been broken by rivals such as Advanced Micro Devices and Cyrix, which is owned by National Semiconductor.

Intel may have been a victim of its own success. There is a saying in the computer industry that: "What Andy giveth, Bill taketh away." The Andy is Andy Grove, chief executive of Intel, and the Bill is Microsoft's Bill Gates; the meaning is that every time Intel produces a new semiconductor with faster processing power, Microsoft comes up with new software that slows it down again.

Brazier says Intel has found itself a step ahead of Microsoft, which has not yet produced the software to gobble up the latest increases in processing power. "If you buy a low-spec PC, you will still get plenty of performance from today's software."

Meanwhile PC sales forecasts remain upbeat, even if growth is expected to slow. The research group International Data Corporation, for example, predicts that the number of PCs sold worldwide this year will be 13.4 per cent higher than in 1997, compared to last year's 15.2 per cent growth; in the US it says growth will fall from 19 per cent to 15.4 per cent.

But margins are likely to get tighter. Compaq has already signalled that it intends to cut prices further. And Marek Vaygelt, an analyst with the UK-based research company Romtec-GfK, says: "I think we will see manufacturers give in to selling sub-$1,000 PCs in Europe this year. The consumer market in Europe is quite stagnant at the moment, and they are realising that to give it a boost they will have to sell at these lower prices."

Since the dawn of the industry the cost of computing power has been falling, but the relentless drive to offer more complex software and greater functionality has ensured that users are forced to upgrade endlessly, so that on some occasions the cost of the machine on their desks has actually risen rather than fallen. "It's as if the automotive industry took all of the low-end cars off the road," says Vaygelt.

There is a consensus, however, that over the last few years, the cost per PC has been falling. And the more prices fall, the more PCs the manufacturers will have to sell in order to maintain the double-digit growth rates investors have come to expect from them.

For the moment, few seem to think that heady growth has done anything more than take a pause for breath. However one thing is sure: there will be anxious eyes on the financial results of the key players over the coming months. — *The Observer*

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The Washington Post

'Worse to Come' for Asia's Ailing Tigers

Keith B. Richburg in Hong Kong

THE REGION'S currencies have largely stabilized — they are far lower in value, but no longer plummeting. Stock markets have ended their downward slide for now. Parliaments are revising laws, opening up closed economies and allowing foreigners larger chunks of the pie. And overseas firms are already in the neighborhood, cautiously poking through the rubble in search of bargains.

Is the worst finally over for Southeast Asia's ailing "tiger" economies? After eight months of financial turmoil, is the region now looking at recovery?

Not quite, say economists and regional analysts. In fact, most warn that the worst is yet to come.

"The economic shoe is only just beginning to fall," said David Roche, chief strategist for the London-based group Independent Strategy. For one thing, he said, the region has not yet experienced the major fall in industrial production — or the widespread layoffs — expected later in the year, particularly in South Korea and Thailand as they begin to implement the painful restructuring programs mandated by their International Monetary Fund bailout packages.

"In the next three to six months, we're going to see a lot more stories about corporate failures and bank failures," said Andy Tan, general manager of the Standard and Poor's office in Singapore. "That's a foregone conclusion."

One uncertain element haunting the region is the outlook for China, where economists and others fear a growth slowdown in the world's most populous nation could dramatically disrupt Southeast Asia's recovery efforts. While Chinese officials insist they can achieve 8 percent growth this year, down from 8.8 percent last year, most analysts believe that is optimistic.

A nightmare for Southeast Asia would come if China decided to devalue its currency, the yuan, to make its exports more competitive. That would not only disrupt the Hong Kong dollar's current "peg" to the U.S. greenback — it would likely set off a wave of competitive devaluations that would further hamper efforts at economic revival.

That appears unlikely, at least for a while. Chinese officials have insisted they have no plans to devalue; the currency is not freely convertible, and China has a $140 billion war chest of foreign reserves. But even without a devaluation, China is feeling pressed to keep competitive for export markets and investment dollars.

The main trouble spot remains Indonesia, which is grappling with its worst economic and social crisis in three decades. After 32 years in power, President Suharto was unanimously elected to another five-year term last week by an assembly he largely controls. But the future still looks uncertain, with food riots and attacks on ethnic Chinese in the provinces, unrest on college campuses in the capital and questions about whether the country's new vice president, B.J. Habibie, is a credible successor to Suharto.

Even more troubling are concerns that Suharto, 76, is preparing to jettison the country's IMF reform package, which he has reportedly described as violating the country's constitution. The latest disbursement has already been held up, prompting fears the entire package is unraveling. And Suharto's new cabinet, named last weekend, is made up of cronies, including one of his closest business associates, and his eldest daughter. Their appointments are likely to unnerve foreign investors.

In Thailand, where Prime Minister Chuan has received widespread praise for adhering to strict IMF guidelines, the government faces a parliamentary vote of confidence this month. In the Philippines, which generally has been less affected by the regional crisis, elections in May could see a populist former movie actor, Joseph Estrada, become the next president. Foreign investors and local business leaders question whether Estrada would continue the liberalization and privatization measures now under way.

Even in South Korea, where newly elected President Kim Dae Jung's bold pledges of reform have managed to stabilize the markets after months of financial turmoil, the president faces an unruly National Assembly controlled by his opponents, and a revolt by powerful conglomerates against his reform plans. There are also serious new concerns that Malaysia may be in worse shape financially than the government in Kuala Lumpur has acknowledged so far.

What is missing now — besides a solution in Indonesia — is a single country or market to act as a catalyst to the region, similar to the role Japan played in kick-starting Asian economic growth a decade ago. This time, despite pressure from the United States and Western Europe, Japan has shown little enthusiasm for intervening to spur its own stagnant economy and start buying more exports from its Asian neighbors.

The other two large markets in the region, China and India, are consumed by their own internal problems.

Family members of political prisoners demand their release in Seoul last week. Bold new pledges of reform by the new government have not yet banished economic uncertainty PHOTO CHOO YOUN-KONG

U.S. to Expel Iraqis Who Helped CIA

William Branigin

LAWYERS for six Iraqis linked to a failed CIA effort to topple Saddam Hussein said last week they plan to appeal a deportation order issued by a U.S. immigration judge on the basis of secret evidence that their presence here threatens national security.

After spending nearly a year in detention in California, the six were ordered "excluded and deported from the United States" at the end of a 147-page decision, most of which was classified and withheld even from defense lawyers.

Immigration Judge D.D. Sitgraves ruled last week that the six could not claim political asylum "because there are reasonable grounds for regarding [them] as a danger to the national security of the United States."

Defense attorneys said that while they would probably ask the Board of Immigration Appeals in Falls Church, Virginia, to take up the case, they are severely hamstrung since they do not know what evidence the government has or even precisely what the charges are.

The case is one of a number of recent instances in which Arabs have been detained based on secret evidence that the Immigration and Naturalization Service has received from the FBI or other government agencies.

The six men ordered deported are among more than 6,500 Kurds and Iraqis who were brought to the United States last year after forces loyal to Saddam dismantled a CIA-backed operation aimed at overthrowing the Iraqi dictator. The evacuees were brought first to Turkey, then airlifted to the U.S. territory of Guam in the Pacific. There they were screened by the FBI and CIA during stays of several months before they were eventually flown to the United States.

Of the Iraqi evacuees, 25 were found to be security risks because of allegations that they were secretly serving as double-agents for Saddam, U.S. officials said. They were detained in Guam and brought to California on "parole" so that they could appear before immigration judges, who would determine whether they should be "excluded" from the United States or granted asylum, the officials said.

Nine currently face deportation. The rest have either been granted asylum or have pending applications. If eventually deported, the Iraqis would not necessarily be returned to their homeland, officials said, but could be sent to other countries that agreed to accept them. Their lawyers say they face certain death if sent back to Iraq.

Among those detained near Los Angeles is Safadin Batat, 33, a former aide to Ahmed Chalabi, the leader of the Iraqi National Congress opposition group.

According to his lawyer, Daniel Levy, Batat barely escaped death at the hands of Saddam's agents in northern Iraq in late 1995 when he drank a soda that had been laced with rat poison. He was flown to Britain, where his case attracted considerable publicity.

Armageddon Warning Proves Premature

Kathy Sawyer

ASTEROID 1997 XF11 has already had its impact on Earth. Last week's global dress-rehearsal for Armageddon (which has now been indefinitely postponed) "should serve as a wake-up call," said astronomer Daniel W.E. Green, who works at the astronomical clearinghouse that first informed the world a mile-wide asteroid would be bearing down on Earth in 30 years, with the slight chance of a catastrophic collision on October 26, 2028.

The drama began on Wednesday last week when Brian Marsden, a recognized master at computing orbits from preliminary data, issued a statement that was circulated on the Internet, saying that 30 years from now "it is virtually certain" the asteroid would pass within the moon's distance (less than 250,000 miles), probably much closer, and there was a slight chance it could strike Earth.

What got peoples' attention was that, at a mile wide, this was by far the largest object in modern times to pass so close. Any impact would cause widespread destruction and global ecological damage.

Marsden's prediction was based on observations spanning the three months since the asteroid was detected. The observations were made by four independent groups of astronomers around the world, using different computer software to come up with similar results, said Green, Marsden's associate.

It never occurred to the International Astronomical Union (IAU) team not to put the word out at once, he said. "We're the world clearinghouse. Our job is to get the word out to astronomers . . . We actually get criticized [in the astronomical community] if we hold on to anything too long."

By the time new calculations from researchers at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, showed the asteroid had "zero chance" of hitting Earth, Marsden and his staff were locked in a day-long marathon of television interviews. He learned about the new prediction belatedly, from reporters. The result was a period of confusion.

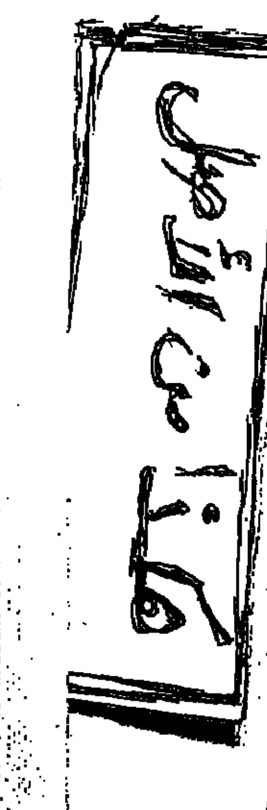
Overnight on Wednesday, veteran asteroid watchers Elinor Helin and Ken Lawrence, of JPL, found previously unreported images of 1997 XF11 in a search of archived photographic plates from 1990 observations at Palomar Observatory.

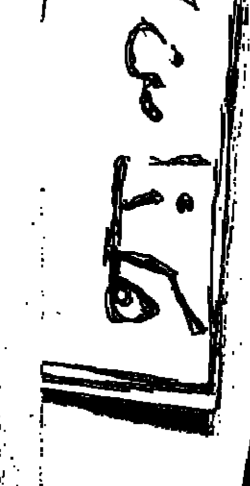
The new data went immediately to Donald K. Yeomans and Paul W. Chodas, ace JPL comet and asteroid trackers who calculate trajectories for NASA spacecraft rendezvous and who correctly predicted the collision between a comet and Jupiter in 1994.

By Thursday last week Yeomans and Chodas had incorporated the new data which showed the asteroid would pass well beyond the distance of the moon.

Marsden and his staff were taken aback, Green said, but as soon as they confirmed the calculations with additional data from Helin, he said, "There was no debate, of course not . . . We never disagreed. We quickly threw [the JPL calculations] into our own [computer] program and saw that the closest approach moved out to 600,000 miles."

It is an unfortunate necessity that the scientific process plays out in a manner that, to the public, appears confused, Chodas said. But when a cosmic object threatens to collide with Earth, "that's a special case."





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Bosnian Town Remains in Limbo

Lee Hockstader in Sarajevo

THE little Bosnian town of Brcko is a kind of ward of the planet Earth whose every twitch, sniffle and shrug is fussed over and scrutinized by a multinational battery of bureaucrats, aid agencies, policemen and heavily armed soldiers.

A U.S. diplomat invested with kingly powers oversees the place, right down to determining who will live in which house, the list of required attendees at meetings of local police chiefs, the ethnic composition of the local municipal council and the pace at which privatization will proceed. His will is enforced by the presence of hundreds of U.S. troops and armor. Officials from dozens of other countries pick over the fine print of municipal governance.

Brcko's status as the Balkans' most closely watched intensive care patient has now been extended until at least early 1999 while an international arbitration tribunal mulls the question of who should ultimately run the place — the Bosnian Serbs who are there now, or the Muslims who were there before the Bosnian war began.

In a closely watched decision, Roberts B. Owen, an American lawyer who heads the arbitration panel, concluded that general instability in the region, and a rapidly shifting political scene in Bosnia's Serb-controlled half, justified a further delay — the third in 15 months. In the meantime, Brcko will remain in the hands of the Serbs, who captured it in 1992.

However, Owen warned the Bosnian Serb Republic that unless their new government fulfills recent promises to work for ethnic reintegration in Brcko, the arbitration panel would give control of the town to Bosnia's other half, the Muslim-Croat federation, next year.



Armed response . . . a U.S. patrol in Brcko monitors the uneasy peace PHOTO: ALMIR ARNAUT

The intense spotlight trained on Brcko can be explained by its position on the map. It is situated on an isthmus connecting the two parts of Serb-controlled territory in Bosnia. Without control over Brcko, the Serbs point out, their state would be cut in two.

But the town also sits astride the road that connects the Muslim-Croat federation with Croatia proper — and the rest of central Europe to the north. Without Brcko, say the Muslims, their access to the rest of Europe would be severely crimped.

Small wonder, then, that Serbs and Muslims have threatened to go to war over Brcko.

Before the Balkan conflict, Brcko was a predominantly Muslim town, with just a fifth of its residents listing themselves as Serbs. The Serbs captured Brcko in 1992, and continued to hold it when fighting ceased in 1995. Virtually all of the town's Muslim residents fled or were killed, although Muslims continued to control some of the suburbs.

At the Dayton peace talks, neither side could agree on the town's fate, so they left it under Serb control with its ultimate fate in the hands of the arbitration panel. Owen postponed the decision twice, in December 1996 and again in February 1997, when he established an international supervisor for the town.

The supervisor, American diplomat Robert W. Farrand, was to oversee the ethnic reintegration of the town, its police force, government and judiciary. He made some progress, and more than 750 Muslim families returned to their prewar homes — more than in all other Serb-controlled territory combined.

But for most of 1997, hard-line Serbs blocked most of Farrand's efforts — setting up illegal roadblocks, intimidating Muslims who tried to return to their homes, attacking international officials and trying to rig local elections.

Owen said last Sunday that the hard-liners' actions would have led him to turn Brcko over to the Muslim-Croat federation. But the Serb hard-liners were defeated in elections last fall, and a new, moderate government took power in January pledging complete cooperation with Western officials in Brcko.

Making Capital Out of Punishment

OPINION
Ellen Goodman

AT LEAST it isn't China. In that benighted country, prisoners are subject to both the worst of the old totalitarian ways and the crudest of capitalism.

On the one hand, you can still get executed in China for your political beliefs. On the other hand, you can then have your organs sold in the marketplace to the highest bidders.

In China, prison authorities actually prep pre-executed bodies to save the parts and doctors stand by to reap the remains. It's even reported that prisoners with prime organs and ready customers get bumped to the front of the execution line.

But in Missouri, they aren't talking about post-mortem sales figures. They are, however, considering a proposal to make death row prisoners an offer they can't refuse.

Under a bill just filed in the state legislature, an inmate sentenced to death would be offered the option of giving up his kidney or bone marrow. For the price of a body part, he could have capital punishment commuted to life without parole.

The use of prisoners as spare body-part factories, or organ farms if you prefer, is the latest attempt to deal with what economists call drily a problem of supply and demand.

In the United States there are 57,690 people on organ waiting lists. In 1996, one person died every three hours for want of a transplant. That's no small problem. This gap between the number of donors and the number of patients has enticed all sorts of organ entrepreneurship.

In the mid-1980s, a Virginia businessman first came up with the idea of importing poor Third World people and paying them for a kidney. This led the then Senator Al Gore to push through a law that banned the sale of human organs and tissue.

While this law hasn't entirely blocked the market, it has blackened it. A few weeks ago, two Chinese were arrested in an FBI sting in New York for trying to sell the corneas, kidneys, livers and lungs of executed prisoners.

We have been quite properly queasy about the free-market approach to the human body. There are some things that aren't and shouldn't be for sale — among them an "extra" cornea or "spare" kidney.

We do let people sell blood, hair, sperm. We've paid surrogate mothers and egg "donors." But we've become increasingly uneasy, especially since a bidding war erupted in human eggs, upping the price to $5,000 for a month's supply.

We should be even more uneasy about getting lifesaving surgery mixed up with the death penalty. Even in China, there's a difference between execution for punishment and dismemberment for profit. When you can make a dollar from a liver or lung, it becomes a grisly incentive for capital punishment. Last year, the Chinese executed some 4,000 prisoners.

Missouri has just 87 prisoners on death row and this bill offers commutation through transplantation. But do we really want justice determined by the medical marketplace?

All this brings us to the bottom line, to the word *donor*. The system we now have depends on a value rarely heard in the marketplace: altruism.

It's been a long, slow, hard sell to convince people to donate their own organs and those of the people they loved. We have old and complex attitudes toward death and the human body.

Every scheme that offers dollars for "donations," every entrepreneur who brings trade-offs into the system, every incentive plan that is tinged with coercion, is likely to undermine the whole system.

This is one area in which the much-lauded free market doesn't work and doesn't belong. Kidneys aren't commodities and livers aren't objects. We need more donors — not deal-makers.

Tobacco Co. Is Top Donor

Ruth Marcus

FOR THE third year running, tobacco maker Philip Morris was the biggest "soft money" donor to the Republican Party, giving $1.2 million in contributions last year, according to figures compiled by Common Cause. The Democratic Party's biggest soft money donor was the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, which contributed $430,000.

The Common Cause analysis, based on reports by the parties to the Federal Election Commission, showed that tobacco interests gave a total of more than $3 million in soft money to the national parties last year, 82 percent to Republicans.

The biggest industry soft money donors were securities and investment interests, which contributed $4.3 million.

"Soft money" refers to unlimited donations from individuals, corporations and labor unions to political party committees. Corporations and unions are prohibited from making direct contributions to candidates for federal elections, and individuals may not give more than $20,000 annually to political parties to help get federal candidates elected.

Sandinistas Divided By Sex Scandal

Serge F. Kovaleski in Managua

FOR much of Zoilamerica Narvaez Murillo's life, there has been a haunting dualism to the personality of Nicaragua's former president and preeminent Marxist revolutionary — Daniel Ortega, her stepfather.

On the one hand, there was Ortega the impassioned and idealistic stalwart of the Sandinista National Liberation Front who led the uprising that banished dictator Anastasio Somoza in 1979, repelled the U.S.-backed contra forces fighting the Sandinistas and ushered in an era of socialism to this impoverished country of 4.4 million people.

But for Narvaez, 30, there is a darker side to Ortega. She has accused her stepfather of sexually abusing her, starting when she was 11 years old and continuing for more than a decade, mostly during the 1980s when Ortega was president. Narvaez also has alleged that he harassed her until as recently as January — nearly seven years after she had married another high-ranking Sandinista, with whom she had two children.



Narvaez: claims Ortega sexually abused her from the age of 11

The allegations against the secretary-general of the opposition Sandinista party — first made public this month in an open letter by Narvaez — have sent seismic waves through Nicaragua's political and social circles.

Less than two months before the Sandinistas are to hold a congress to plot their future, the scandal is creating deep divisions within a party whose political clout has steadily eroded over the years. The Sandinista hierarchy has swiftly closed ranks around Ortega, 52, defending his moral integrity.

Ortega has not denied the allegations, only saying at a news conference that they have caused him "pain and sadness."

In the meantime, the feminist wing of the party has called on Ortega to step down, as have other women's groups here. They contend Narvaez's case underscores how severe the problem of sexual abuse is in Nicaragua.

Narvaez stressed that the timing of her accusations had nothing to do with this year's party congress, saying, "I could no longer continue waiting because this was not a matter of political calculation. I felt the moment of my liberation had arrived."

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Burma's Bad Image Is Big Business for U.S. Lobbyists

R. Jeffrey Smith

THE military rulers of Burma are well aware they have an image problem in Washington. The Clinton administration and human rights groups regularly recount how the generals took office by hijacking a 1990 election, keep hundreds of opponents in inhumane prisons, and solicit investments from Asian drug lords.

But a bad image can mean big business for U.S. public relations and lobbying firms. Several firms have been conducting a campaign on Burma's behalf in classic Washington style — producing upbeat newsletters, arranging seminars and interviews and funding all-expense-paid trips — partly to persuade the Clinton administration to lift trade sanctions against the regime.

For a fee of nearly a half-million dollars, for example, a Burmese company that U.S. officials say is close to the military leadership last year hired a former assistant secretary of state for narcotics control, Ann Wrobleski, and her lobbying firm, Jefferson Waterman International, to communicate the company's "positions and interests," according to the contract.

Another, well-connected firm in Burma's capital of Rangoon hired a public relations firm and a lobbying firm last year, paying $252,000 to former television reporter Jackson Bain to help the Burmese Embassy burnish the country's reputation, and an undisclosed sum to the Atlantic Group, a lobbying and public relations company that is working more directly to help overturn the U.S. sanctions.

In addition, various U.S. corporations that want to do business with Burma or already invest there, including the California-based energy company, Unocal Corp., have been spending money to promote the idea that Washington's barriers to new U.S. trade with Burma do not reflect a politically sound U.S. strategy. The sanctions, which President Clinton imposed last May, bar new investment by U.S. firms in commercial or energy projects.

Lobbyists acting on these firms' behalf argue that Washington should reconsider keeping any unilateral sanctions on Burma because sanctions over time will become a wasting asset and slow Burma's exposure to the outside world.

The administration has given no hint that it plans to relax sanctions.

Maureen Aung-Thwin, who directs the Soros Foundation's Open Society Institute Burma Project, complained that the reception Burma gets from institutions in Washington "sends really mixed signals to a government that is beginning to feel the pressure of the isolation and the sanctions."

Lobbyists promoting a positive image of Burma say that they are doing nothing wrong. But the work is an uphill battle. According to the State Department's most recent public report on Burma, covering a six-month period ending last September, the Burmese regime "made no progress" in moving toward democratization and continued its "severe violations" of human rights.

Even Gauchos Get the Blues

In South America, Yankee culture is suddenly cool, writes **Anthony Faiola** in Buenos Aires

MUDDY Waters stares down from the wall with Polaroid eyes, grinning ear to ear as cool rhythms ooze through an overheated club that no-smoking laws forgot. There is enough black clothing for Big Joe Turner's funeral, enough berets for a picnic in Paris. And man, oh, man, has the guy on stage got some serious girl troubles.

"Oh baby, oh baby," belts out Argentine bluesman and club owner Jorge "Napo" Napoleone. "I ain't never found nobody so crazy as you."

The raucous crowd apparently has never found nobody so crazy as his baby, either. "Keep it coming," one woman yells in Spanish through her impossibly burnt-down cigarette butt. "How bad is she?" shouts another Porteño — as the residents of this port city are called — who is clad in a black FBI T-shirt.

"Oh baby," croons the Argentine in Spanish. "Oh baby, how you done me so wrong."

Make no mistake. The Argentines got the blues. So do the Brazilians, the Uruguayans, the Chileans and much of the rest of Latin America. Big-name American acts and home-grown artists can be found in almost any city in the region, sounding as mournful in their singing as their audiences are happy to hear them.

The popularity of the blues here underscores a cultural phenomenon sweeping South America, where everything stamped "U.S.A." is suddenly red hot — and blue.

Choruses of "Yankee Go Home" have faded as the region's once ubiquitous dictatorships and radical left give way to a new age of free-market economies and eager connections with the United States. Those closer economic and political ties have now evolved into a cultural invasion from the north unlike any before, and it has locals here reveling in things American far beyond mainstream Madonna songs and Sylvester Stallone flicks.

It is, experts say, an example of how it's cool to be American again in the global society. It's not just about Parisians on Rollerblades, Russians eating Whoppers or Himalayan Sherpas wearing Washington Redskins T-shirts. Today, it's about Terrence McNally, Jean-Michel Basquiat and B.B. King.

"When I was growing up, French was the second language of the intellectual community, but that has completely changed," said Tomas Eloy Martinez, one of Argentina's most celebrated authors. "English has replaced French — not just in economic circles but now in cultural circles. It has everything to do with America and the fact that it is being viewed as culturally important in a way we never thought before."

South Americans — from the lowest classes to the highest rungs of an intelligentsia that once considered European culture far more worthy of absorption — are flocking to take in more sophisticated American offerings. Among them: local productions of American plays, book signings by American authors, exhibits by experimental American artists.

Meanwhile, American symbols have become the ultimate marketing tools across the continent — often without true cognizance of their meaning in the States. A popular brand of jeans in Argentina, for instance, uses the Confederate flag as its logo — although four people here who were asked randomly about it had no clue of its association with slavery. "It's American," said a young man wearing a Confederate flag on his backside. "It means liberty."

Everyone — from artists to entrepreneurs to housewives — is clamoring for classes in "American English." And there is a growing tendency throughout the region to adopt English words into everyday speech — using "shopping" as a noun for a shopping mall or "top" when describing something as the ultimate.

"It's an amazing turnaround," said James Moore, the cultural attache at the U.S. Embassy here, which helped bring such performers as Liza Minnelli and the American Ballet Theater to multiple sold-out appearances in Buenos Aires.

"After the fall of the dictators in Latin America and the invasion of mass media, a lot of the distrust of America faded away," Moore said. "They don't feel guilty about enjoying American culture anymore, and they are increasingly interested in the more sophisticated stuff — not just the Big Macs."

Nowhere is the switch from Yankee bashing to Yankee hugging more obvious than historically Eurocentric Argentina, where 90 percent of the population is of European descent and where Juan Peron rose to the nation's highest office on anti-American rhetoric.

These days, the only Damn Yankees in Argentina are the ones on stage. Buenos Aires is the capital of Latin American theater, yet almost 50 percent of the plays in production here are translated works by U.S. playwrights — most of them imported from Broadway and off-Broadway. The list of hits includes McNally's "Master Class," which had its premiere in Washington and went on become one of the biggest grossing plays of all time in South America.

"Plays from America are what the people want to see now," said Federico Gonzalez del Pino, co-owner of F&F, who contracts with the Elisabeth Martin Agency in New York to bring U.S. stage works to South America. "They are very 'top' right now."

Perhaps the hottest slice of American culture outside the mainstream, however, remains the blues. There are at least six blues clubs in Buenos Aires and about as many in Rio de Janeiro — and their numbers are growing.

Blues are so popular here, in fact, that many American blues musicians — along with their jazz and soul cousins — who are unable to find work in the States are flocking here for top dollar.

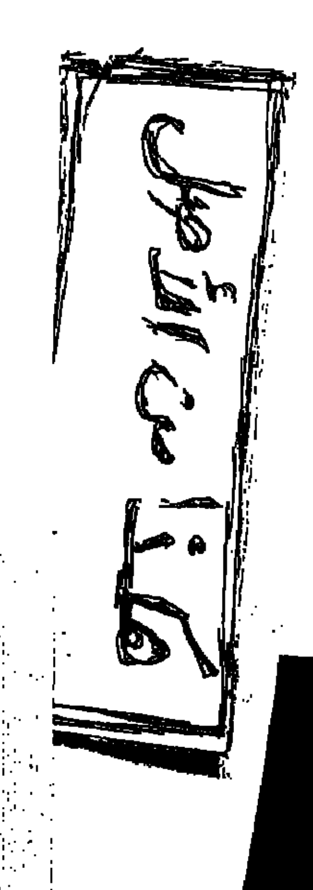
"I couldn't get a record company in the States to talk to me," said Bruce Ewan, a Washington blues musician who also sells advertising for The Washington Post. "But when I came to Buenos Aires, they flew me in first class. I got hundreds of calls on a radio show and played sold-out concerts with lines around the block. [Now] I've cut a record in Brazil, and it's doing great."

THE big names are cashing in, too. B.B. King regularly tours South America. James Brown just knocked out three sold-out shows in Buenos Aires and drew almost obsessive media coverage. Two of hottest bands in South America's Southern Cone right now are Argentina's Memphis La Blusera and the Mississippi Blues Band.

Blues in Buenos Aires actually dates to the 1970s, when a couple of bands began singing the melancholic tunes in Spanish. But the true breakout came in the early 1990s and is now cresting as the Argentines, a melancholy bunch if there ever was one — the tango, in fact, is an ode to sorrow, and Buenos Aires has more psychoanalysts per capita than anywhere else on Earth — have gone loco over the whole shtick of the smoky bar and musical lament.

The popularity of blues has grown so intense that a massive festival is being planned for the Argentine resort of Mar del Plata this summer. A similar festival was just held in nearby Uruguay, drawing throngs of fans.

"You got to understand, man," said Paul Brodesky, a popular Buenos Aires disc jockey who broadcasts a different live blues band from his studios every Saturday night. "It's hot now. It's about music. It's about America. It's about suffering. And we love all of those things."



Martinique's Verbal Hurricane

Michael Upchurch

SOLIBO MAGNIFICENT
By Patrick Chamoiseau
Translated from the French and Creole by Rose-Myriam Rejouis and Val Vinokurov
Pantheon. 190pp. $23

EVERY SERIOUS booklover knows there's no sensation to top it: the discovery of a new writer whose voice and imagination are like nothing you've ever read before.

When Patrick Chamoiseau's novel Texaco appeared in English last year, it fell — or, more accurately, vaulted — into this exclusive category. With its rich cornucopia of characters and its giddy marvels of poetic prose, it recreated the history of Chamoiseau's native Martinique, from its slave-era past to its shantytown present, with a passion and panache that made the book feel like an instant classic. Winner of the Prix Goncourt when published in Paris in 1992, it was a novel so animated and all-inclusive in the Caribbean microcosm it portrayed that in a single stroke it guaranteed Chamoiseau's standing as a world-class author.

But it had welcome company. Creole Folktales, Chamoiseau's sly and sassy recasting of traditional Martinican lore found its way into paperback by the end of last year. School Days, a 1994 memoir in which he humorously recounts French-versus-Creole language battles in the classroom, appeared in English simultaneously with Texaco. Both offered keen pleasures while making it plain that Texaco is the centerpiece of this oeuvre.

Now comes Solibo Magnificent, a newly translated novel from 1988 that, with the benefit of hindsight, feels like a warm-up exercise for Texaco. With its slapstick humor and straightforward social criticism, it is somewhat cruder. Still, it has the boisterous spirit and buoyant wordplay that mark all of Chamoiseau's work. Its title character, a storyteller in the island's oral tradition, is given to delivering "verbal hurricanes," and the book he inspires depicts a veritable tempest of mishaps.

It is Carnival time in Fort-de-France, the capital of Martinique, and under a tamarind tree on the town's savannah, 15 old friends have gathered to prolong the nighttime festivities. Among them are a fisherman, several street vendors, a couple of odd-jobbers, a pair of musicians, Chamoiseau himself and the much-loved Solibo, who, in the middle of telling a story, is "snickt by the Word" (this odd parlance is explored in greater detail later on).

He promptly asphyxlates, but his friends, in their befuddled condition, fail to notice. After all, Solibo's silences are as much a part of his tale-telling dramas as his phrase-spinning is. When the bad news finally dawns on them, one of them runs to find a doctor but ends up, in a hysterical state, at the police station instead. The result: The chief sergeant, thrilled to have his first "suspicious body" in four years, concludes that foul play has occurred — and the 14 friends are accused of murder.

Inquiries ensue, testimony is offered (or brutally coerced), and soon a high-ranking chief inspector is brought into the picture. Trained in "the land of Descartes" but retaining a native Martinican familiarity with "zombies and various evil soucougnans" (creatures of West Indian folklore), he too is convinced that a homicide took place, and he simply ignores it when one of his suspects suggests that "to look for who killed Solibo can get at no truth. The real question is: Who is Solibo?"

THAT is Chamoiseau's question as well, and while he finds in Solibo an "ever-refreshing glossolalia," he also sees in him an oral storytelling tradition tumbling into eclipse. As a character in his own book, Chamoiseau takes a worshipful stance toward Solibo, while denigrating his own talents as a "word-scratcher." The other "suspects" offer their own adoring reminiscences of Solibo as well, until a shadowy portrait of him emerges, "like a reflection on a window, a sculpture with facets that allowed no angle to reflect the whole."

If the novel has a shortcoming, it is that Solibo never quite transcends the symbolic role assigned him. Still, he's an amiable presence in the memory of his friends, and a source of zenlike wisdom as he wrangles with Chamoiseau over the differing merits of spoken and written narrative.

Chamoiseau's prose, as always, offers heady delights, whether he's describing Solibo's fluctuating body weight or a "basaltic" old man named Congo who "seemed to outlast Death four centuries."

Translators Rose-Myriam Rejouis and Val Vinokurov deftly reconstitute Chamoiseau's French, Creole and idiolectal coinages into an appropriately whimsical and multi-layered English. French-vs.-Creole showdowns lead to some entertainingly raucous havoc, especially during police interrogations.

Despite these pleasures, however, Solibo Magnificent is not the place to start with Chamoiseau. That place is Texaco, which like Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years Of Solitude defines its chosen time and place with such exuberance and authority that already it feels like an indispensable part of the Caribbean literary landscape.

Angst in the Arab World

Robert Irwin

THE DREAM PALACE OF THE ARABS
A Generation's Odyssey
By Fouad Ajami
Pantheon. 344pp. $26



ILLUSTRATION: ANTHONY RUSSO

IN The Seven Pillars Of Wisdom (1935), T.E. Lawrence wrote that he "meant to make a new nation, to restore lost influence, to give twenty millions of Semites the foundations on which to build an inspired dream palace of their national thoughts."

Lawrence's account of the Arab Revolt in World War I and of his own part in it told a story of spectacular victories against the Turks and feats of heroism, yet the book was in the end an account of hopes betrayed and promises broken.

Fouad Ajami's account of political and cultural developments in the Near East since World War II is similarly melancholy, a kind of unsystematic group biography of disappointed Arab intellectuals. Ajami himself was born in southern Lebanon (a predominantly Shiite region) in 1945. The leading figures in The Dream Palace Of The Arabs belong to an older and once more hopeful generation. They include Naguib Mahfouz (b. 1911), the Nobel Prize-winning Egyptian novelist; Khalil Hawi (1919-82), a Lebanese poet and academic; Louis Awad (1915-90), a Coptic Christian academic and journalist; Nizar Qabbani (b. 1923), a Lebanese poet; Adonis (b. 1930), a Syro-Lebanese poet; Abdelrahman Munif (b. 1933), a novelist whose works have caused him to be exiled from Saudi Arabia; and Sadiq Jalal al-Azm (b. 1937), a Syrian Marxist intellectual.

Some in this generation of secularly minded intellectuals had been inspired by a classic of political-historical polemic, The Arab Awakening: The Story Of The Arab Nationalist Movement, published in 1938 by George Antonius. In that book, Antonius chronicled the collapse of Turkish power in the Near East and implicitly looked forward to the complete emancipation of the Arab world. Although Antonius was a Christian Arab born in Lebanon and educated in Egypt, he gave preeminent place in his book to the Palestinian Arab struggle against Zionism. According to the concluding lines of The Arab Awakening, "the logic of facts is inexorable. It shows that no room can be made in Palestine for a second nation except by dislodging or exterminating the nation in possession." It seems from the immediately preceding paragraphs that their author assumed that it would be the Jews who would be dislodged or exterminated. Antonius, who died in 1942, did not live to see his expectations confounded.

Nevertheless, Arab politicians and thinkers continued to nourish great expectations throughout the 1950s and most of the 1960s.

After Col. Gamal Abdul Nasser's triumph over Britain, France and Israel during the Suez crisis of 1956, he became a focus of hope not just for Egyptians but for most Arabs.

The Naksa, the "Relapse" of 1967, when Israel once again inflicted crushing defeats on Arab armies in the Six-Day War, was therefore a horrid shock. Ajami's account of the economic performance of Arab countries is notably bleak. The Middle East and North Africa combined export a smaller volume of manufactured goods than does Finland. In Egypt, it could be seen, Nasser's policies of agricultural reform and import substitution had been as unsuccessful as his military adventures. Other countries were hardly more successful. Lebanon was taken apart by feuding militias led by unprincipled warlords. Algeria's ruling regime corruptly wasted its oil and mineral resources. Iraq launched bloodily expensive and ultimately unsuccessful attacks against Iran and then Kuwait. The Palestinian leadership in exile, after a more or less unbroken record of strategic miscalculations, finally signed an agreement with Israel that gave them very little indeed.

The young, having despaired of Nasserism, pan-Arabism and Palestinian activism, as well as of their ineffective and unbelieving parents, began to turn to Islam for the answers. For Ajami this is no answer, but merely another problem — a disaster even. The Dream Palace Of The Arabs is not just a lament for what has failed to come to pass; it is also a lament for what has been lost — the old, confessionally and ethnically tolerant, polyglot, Levantine ambiance, the ascendancy of liberal elites, and the open-minded engagement with Western culture.

The Dream Palace Of The Arabs is, thus, an absorbing and sadly moving account of what political, economic and social failures on a grand scale have meant in human terms and at an individual level.

Racial Fieldwork

Nadine Cohodas

THE WHITE SCOURGE
Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites In Texas Cotton Culture
By Neil Foley
California. 326pp. $29.95

THE LION'S SHARE of literature about race, both fiction and nonfiction, has dealt with issues of black and white. In The White Scourge, University of Texas history professor Neil Foley adds to the mix the presence of Mexicans and explores notions of class and culture among all three.

His book centers on life in the Texas cotton fields and covers the development, growth and change in this complex region over the last century. A central theme, though it gets lost on occasion, is an ever-evolving notion of whiteness — who was white and how that was defined. "In Texas, unlike other parts of the South," he writes, "whiteness meant not only not black but also not Mexican. Whiteness also came increasingly to mean a particular kind of white person. Not all whites, in other words, were equally white."

Whites who were successful, he goes on, "began to racialize poor whites as the 'scrubs and runts' of white civilization, both as an excuse to displace them and justification for the impoverished condition of those who remained."

In his introduction Foley explains the system of land-tenure that was a pivotal factor in the class and racial structure. At the heart of the system was the metaphoric "ladder" of upward mobility. In the best of circumstances, the ladder worked like this: A young male farmhand could climb rung by rung from hired hand, sharecropper and tenant farmer to farm owner. At the end of the process, with ownership firmly in hand, he could have full citizenship, not only in the legal sense but socially within his community.

Foley explains how this "ladder" of success broke down and the consequences for those whites who believed they had a right to ascend. When they failed, they were lumped into a class of lesser whites. To their landlords they seemed more like itinerant Mexicans or black wage laborers, who actually were the preferred hands. One planter put it this way: "White tenants are the least desirable, they are ignorant and lazy and seem to do as little work as possible to get along."

Foley has done yeoman's research, bringing together a great deal of material from government records, dissertations, books, articles, manuscript collections and interviews. Indeed, one of the revelations for those not familiar with agricultural history is the wealth of information that exists on the subject. Hearing records as presented by Foley offer story after story of heartbreaking hardship. And perhaps the most painful thing is the willingness of those in authority to yield to the men with financial power at the expense of those trying mightily to ascend the ladder.

Foley's discussion of the effect on struggling farmers of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 is particularly pointed. Landlords took advantage of loopholes in the law to evict poor whites from the farms they were working, he writes, and replaced them with easily obtained cheap Mexican laborers. His chapter on the failure of interracial unity among Texas socialists, who claimed to be helping farm workers exposes the rawest elements of the debate. His discussion on the role of women in the cotton culture and the differences among "Anglo, African and Mexican American" women includes fascinating information. The "gendered ideology" of agricultural work, to use Foley's oft repeated phrase, was an effort "to impose rigid boundaries between men's work and women's work ... with women working principally in the home and men running the farm. However, the division of labor on central Texas cotton farms was never rigidly observed, and women — especially Mexican and black women — frequently performed 'men's work.'" But at day's end Foley notes, they were also expected to do the household chores.

Foley's book is drenched in research, so much so that readers may feel they are drowning in it. More rigorous editing could have made the considerable information presented easier to digest.

Le Monde

Romanians bridle at austerity measures

Andrei Neacsu in Bucharest

THE ROMANIAN government led by the Christian Democrat prime minister Victor Ciorbea — and recently taken to task by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for having failed to produce a 1998 budget — has just pulled a nasty surprise on the nation. Instead of implementing the wide-ranging reform that was supposed to remedy the country's disastrous economic situation, it increased the price of petrol by 50 per cent at the beginning of March.

The move, which means motorists now have to pay the equivalent of 30 cents for a litre of petrol, is bound to make the prices of other products surge out of control. Romanians will find the price hike difficult to stomach, particularly as it has not been offset by any pay rise. Wage-earners were already having a hard time making ends meet with an average monthly income of about $100.

In 1997 purchasing power plummeted by 30 per cent. The number of unemployed is now nudging 1 million, or almost 10 per cent of the population of working age.

"The Ciorbea government wants us to die of hunger and to wear rags," says Matei Bratianu, a leader of the National Union Block, which has joined the Cartel Alpha trade union confederation in threatening to bring its 2 million members out onto the streets.

The IMF's negotiator, the reputedly intractable Poul Thomsen, who has been accused by the local press of being "unfamiliar with the realities of Romanian society", left Bucharest on February 27, exhausted by interminable and unsuccessful negotiations.

With his departure, the government's hopes of getting the IMF to release immediately an $83 million tranche of the $430 million loan it granted in 1997 were dashed. It is believed in some quarters that this means the days of the Ciorbea government are numbered.

Although the IMF loan has been postponed indefinitely, this does not seem to worry foreign investors. The French cement group Lafarge, which became a majority shareholder in Romania's biggest cement manufacturer, Rouncim, several months ago, has decided not to wait for the IMF's green light.

Jérôme Monod, head of the Suez-Lyonnaise des Eaux group, who was in Bucharest in February at the height of the political crisis, said that he was not surprised by "the agitation inherent in any new democracy" that has swept across Romania.

During his visit he made it clear that his group was "prepared to invest several hundred million dollars" in order to take over water management in a number of Romanian cities.

Although it is now disappointed, the IMF last year congratulated this first "reformist" government, which has been in power since November 1996, on having succeeded in its bid to engineer macroeconomic stability.

The fact that the prime minister managed, without causing the slightest unrest, to restructure the heavily loss-making mining sector — a process that involved the voluntary redundancy, with compensation, of 70,000 miners out of a total workforce of 210,000 — was regarded as a feather in Ciorbea's cap. In June 1997 his government also managed to hold the annual inflation rate to about 30 per cent by refusing to authorise any pay increases.

But this improvement in economic fortunes was short-lived. At about the same time, in order to rescue two state-owned banks — Bancorex (the country's largest) and the Agricultural Bank — the government was forced to shell out more than $1 billion. This partly explains its current budgetary difficulties.

In introducing its latest austerity measures, Ciorbea's cabinet apparently wanted to demonstrate to its detractors — and to the IMF — that it had the courage to take unpopular decisions.

The government hopes that the large increase in the price of petrol will limit the budget deficit to 3.6 per cent of gross domestic product, the level demanded by the IMF.

In a bid to improve government finances, Ciorbea raised value added tax in February from 18 to 22 per cent. But as he is keen to adhere to the conditions demanded by the IMF, he refused to promise that the annual inflation rate would be reduced to 37 per cent. It will probably work out at about 45 per cent this year.

The government has pledged to privatise at least 1,600 enterprises in 1998, a move that is expected to bring $1.3 billion into state coffers. But one of the reasons there has been deadlock in the negotiations with the IMF is that the fund is not convinced revenues will be as high as that. In the IMF's view, "the most attractive enterprises were already privatised in 1997 for a total sum of $1 billion".

The government knows it has to sell off a score of industrial conglomerates, which together owe the state something in the order of $1 billion. It has therefore been forced to revise all its estimates downwards.

To take just one example, a huge company in the heavy industry sector, which had earlier been valued at more than $80 million but is deeply in debt, has just been sold to a Norwegian group for a mere $500,000.

(March 8-9)

No go . . . A member of the Romanian driver's union behind the wheel of a wrecked car during a rally in Bucharest. Drivers are protesting against a 50 per cent increase in the price of petrol PHOTO: ADRIAN POPESCU

Nigeria topples Sierra Leone's army regime

Thomas Sotinel in Abidjan

THE PRESIDENT of the West-African country of Sierra Leone, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, was returned to office on March 10, less than a year after being toppled by a military coup. The ceremony marking his return was expected to be attended by the Nigerian leader, General Sani Abacha.

Nigerian troops in the West-African peace-keeping force, Ecomog, expelled the ruling junta, the Revolutionary Armed Forces Council (Rafc), on February 12 from Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown.

Since then, Ecomog has seized control of most of Sierra Leone's cities. Clashes are still reportedly taking place in the east of the country, where Ecomog troops and their allies, the Kamajor militia, are fighting the military regime's forces and their guerrilla allies, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

One of the RUF leaders, Sam Bokari, has said that he will continue resisting the Ecomog forces, adding that he has the men and weapons to keep up the fight.

Peace and stability are still distant goals for the people of Sierra Leone, but Freetown is keen to forget the 10 months it spent under the writ of the Rafc.

From the time the military junta took over, up until its defeat at the hands of Nigerian troops, the residents of Freetown suffered from looting and violence by the Rafc and the RUF. The embargo imposed by Nigeria only made things worse. Since the overthrow of the junta, life has been gradually getting back to normal in the capital.

International sanctions — an embargo on oil and weapons — have yet to be lifted, which means that power stations can only produce electricity for 12 hours a day. The administration can do little more than tick over, for two main reasons: it lacks material resources, and rivalries have grown up between the civil servants who stayed in their jobs under the military rulers and those who followed President Kabbah into exile in Conakry, in neighbouring Guinea.

The arrival of the first rice shipment reduced the price of the cereal by two-thirds, making life a lot easier for the capital's residents.

President Kabbah faces a monumental task. A former United Nations official now in his 70s, he was elected in 1996 in polls held at the height of the civil war. His election raised many hopes, which were dashed during the first 14 months of his term. This was a result of the ruling élite becoming increasingly dominated by the Mende, the main ethnic group in the south and east of the country, and because the peace process between the government and the RUF, brokered by Ivory Coast, became increasingly bogged down.

Today a new constraint looms: Nigeria's presence in Sierra Leone. Ecomog forces will eventually consist of 15,000 men. Almost all of them are Nigerian because the other countries belonging to the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) are reluctant to be seen to rally to Nigeria, whose economic and military clout is a source of concern to its neighbours.

President Kabbah therefore has little room for manoeuvre, but he is pinning great hopes on help from the international community, which could give his regime some financial breathing space.

(March 11)

Playing at the politics of indifference

EDITORIAL

IS IT possible to play a political role in France if one comes from a working-class district and if, on top of that, one has an Arab name? The answer should be yes. But the organisation of regional elections on March 15 suggests this is not so.

Over a period of years, *beurs* (second-generation North African immigrants who have French nationality) slowly but surely obtained the right to be regarded as ordinary citizens, to be active in political movements, to stand as candidates and to have the right to sit on municipal or regional councils on their own merits and irrespective of the colour of their skin.

The 1983 "March for Equality" spawned a generation of beur activists who were determined to secure their rightful place according to republican principles. Some 150 municipal councillors of North African origin were elected to office at the 1989 local elections. The trend gathered momentum over the next few years.

Those elected, who originally tended to be active on the left of the political spectrum, then decided to reject the ambiguous beur label, became disillusioned with François Mitterrand's political ethos and began to listen to the siren voices of rightwing and Green parties, who offered them places on their lists.

The campaign for this month's regional elections suggests that the gradual assimilation into mainstream politics of activists from an immigrant background has been brought to a shuddering halt. More alarmingly, there may even have been a reversal in the process of integration.

No major party has had the courage to give serious consideration to candidates of North African origin. Not a single such candidate is to be found on the lists of the so-called pluralist left in the Paris suburbs, where there is a high concentration of immigrants, or on Michel Delebarre's list in the Nord region, also home to a large immigrant community.

Ironically, the National Front has had the impertinence to put forward just such a candidate, a Frenchman of immigrant origin — a ploy that is no more than a smokescreen.

It is difficult to see how we can go on badgering immigrants to "integrate" and continue extolling the principle of "citizenship" if our political leaders continue to treat them with indifference, if not contempt.

Our inability to exploit the throbbing energy of working-class districts and our rejection of a key young population group can only encourage immigrants to look inward and assert their differences, which is totally incompatible with republican ideals.

(March 12)



Oil revenue boosts interest in Iraq's market

Gilles Paris in Baghdad

THE latest showdown between the United Nations and Iraq has not stopped major players in world trade jockeying for position in Baghdad. A huge and promising market is up for grabs. A country with the second-largest estimated oil reserves in the world is going, sooner or later, to have to be put back on its feet.

Two strategies are being played out simultaneously in Iraq. The first concerns agreements that may be concluded as part of UN Resolution 986, known as the "oil-for-food" resolution. It authorises Iraq to sell limited quantities of its main raw material and to buy, in return, food, medicines and capital goods. The second strategy is intended to pave the way for an eventual lifting of international sanctions and Iraq's reappearance on the world market.

The latest figures available to the French finance ministry show that France was the main beneficiary of the first two phases of Resolution 986, which have been in force for more than a year.

While France's market share of world trade is about 6 per cent, it has 17.37 per cent of trade with Iraq. That figure puts France ahead of Australia (11.43 per cent of market share), Jordan (8.65 per cent) and the United States (7.96 per cent). The French opened up an "economic growth" office in Baghdad in 1996.

With the exception of neighbouring Jordan, which is tied to Iraq by a bilateral agreement that allows it to import enough cheap Iraqi oil to meet its own needs, the oil-for-food resolution has mainly benefited the major cereal-producing countries.

The French government's attitude during the latest stand-off between Iraq and the UN did nothing to damage France's standing in Iraqi eyes — though it caused many British and US papers to launch swingeing attacks on France's commercial "greed".

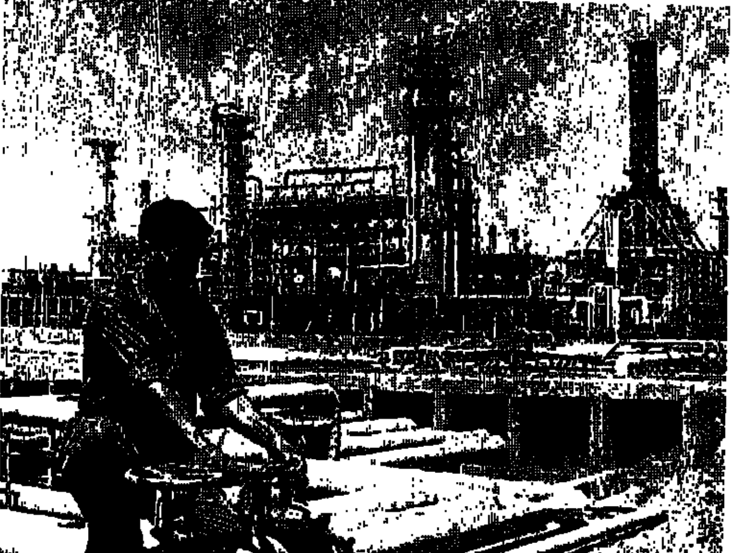
Changes in the political climate also explain why Russia and China have muscled in on the act in the past few months. Their combined market share of 10.52 per cent is now higher than that of the US.

An Iraq-watcher thinks however that France has only a slight edge: "The Iraqis pay at least as much attention to which country they do business with as to criteria such as quality. The Russians have had difficulty in landing contracts because of the poor quality of their products. We know they import products and resell them to the Iraqis, just to get their foot in the door.

"Iraq is not a developing country. It used to be wealthy, and I've often been surprised by how demanding the Iraqis can be when it comes to standards."

The increased value of oil that the UN now allows Iraq to sell ($4 billion worth every six months instead of half that amount) will have the effect of diversifying the type of contracts that can be negotiated within the framework of Resolution 986.

Much higher sums than before have been earmarked for the rehabilitation of the power and water distribution networks. Although these networks are disastrously dilapidated, the purchase of such heavy equipment will not be clinched for many months. The market, though, is huge: a complete rehabilitation of the two vital utilities is expected to cost $16-18 billion.



Currency flow . . . Iraq's oil-for-food agreement with the UN has foreign countries jockeying to sign trade deals PHOTO. KARIM SAHIB

Contracts now in the pipeline are no more than a foretaste of what will come after the lifting of the embargo, which will be announced once the Unscom weapons inspectors give the go-ahead.

It is, of course, Iraq's oil reserves that are most coveted. At a recent press conference the Iraqi oil minister, Amer Mohammad Rashid, said that Iraq's friends in times of need would not be forgotten when it came to sharing out the reserves. He specifically named China, France and Russia.

Oil experts are not totally convinced by his promise. "Russia and China have already secured good contracts," they say. "There are at least two other very big contracts still to be concluded. It would be surprising if they were not granted to US companies."

The fact that US wheat is eaten daily in Iraq and that cars in the US guzzle Iraqi petrol bought by the Russians and immediately sold on to the US demonstrates that politics is not allowed to get in the way of big business.

"US companies have been to see what's cooking here," says an observer in Baghdad. "They naturally don't use their own names, but go through their foreign subsidiaries. But the main thing to remember is that they're here."

When it comes to oil, the US is still haunted by its experience in Vietnam. US oil companies pulled out of the country after the defeat in 1975, despite the fact that they had discovered promising offshore deposits. They never managed to claw their way back in to that market. There have reportedly been calls in the US for the experience not to be repeated.

Since oil can so easily be turned into an instrument of foreign policy, some analysts interpret the moderation of Iraq's demands regarding Resolution 986 ($4 billion worth of oil, when the UN was offering $5.2 billion) as a symptom of its desire not to destabilise an already wobbly market.

"The Iraqis may be having export problems, given the state of the pipeline to Turkey and the terminal on the Gulf," they say. "But they don't have any production problems. The whole thing may have been a friendly gesture to the Saudis."

That policy could be the price to be paid for eventually being brought back into the political fold, as well as a response to Saudi Arabia's opposition to possible US air strikes.

The latest diplomatic note sent back to the French finance ministry mentions the arrival of many Arab states within the framework of oil-for-food. Egypt, Syria, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates are now well established in the Iraqi market.

(March 8-9)

Italian exiles in France back on red alert

Ex-radicals fear they may be sacrificed for the sake of European unity, writes **Nathaniel Herzberg**

FORMER Italian political activists exiled in France fear that their past has finally caught up with them: three are in jail and dozens of others are debating whether to flee the country or give themselves up collectively. French voluntary associations and people in the the arts have rushed to the exiles' defence by forming support groups.

Only two months ago, these former members of armed far-left Italian organisations such as the Red Brigades and Prima Linea, whose presence on French soil had long been tolerated by the authorities, still had high hopes of getting their situation regularised. Now they fear they may be sacrificed on the altar of European unity.

The first warning shot was fired on January 6, when police arrested Franco Pinna at his home in the Paris suburbs. A former activist in the Red Brigades, Pinna received a 14-year jail sentence in Italy for taking part in the hold-up of a gunsmith's shop in Viterbo.

In 1980 a Paris appeal court ruled in favour of Pinna's extradition to Italy, but no prime minister has been prepared to sign the order authorising his deportation. Pinna built a new life in France and fathered two French children. He has worked for the past 15 years as head lighting technician with the Théâtre de Rueil-Malmaison.

A few days after Pinna's arrest, Alfredo Davanzo was picked up by police at his partner's home in Paris. A former Fiat worker, he was given a 13-year jail sentence by an Italian court in 1986 for armed robbery. The Turin public prosecutor issued an international warrant for his arrest in 1991, but French police took no interest in the case.

On January 30 Sergio Tornaghi was arrested in front of a school near Bordeaux as he was dropping off his daughter. He had been sentenced to life imprisonment in Italy for being an accessory to murder. But in 1986 a Paris appeal court ruled against extradition on the grounds that the offences he was accused of were of a "political" nature.

Tornaghi later obtained a residence permit, married a Frenchwoman, with whom he had two daughters, and settled in the small village of Camiac-et-St-Denis. A glassworker who retrained as a computer technician, he is a union representative in the company where he works and active in village life.

Tornaghi is well known and much liked: when he was arrested, teachers could not believe it was a police operation and rang the gendarmerie to say that he had been kidnapped.

These developments have upset the Italian community. Some of its members have left home; others no longer use the telephone. The danger seems all the more menacing because the situation is unclear.

When François Mitterrand was elected president in 1981, France agreed to take in former political activists who had been sentenced under exceptional jurisdiction. In April 1985 Mitterrand told the congress of the League of Human Rights that he intended to protect all those who proclaimed publicly that they had "broken away from the diabolical mechanism to which they had committed themselves . . . embarked on a second phase of their lives, integrated into French society, and in many cases got married, started a family and found a job".

Mitterrand's pledge survived several subsequent changes of government. Around 300 former Italian activists live in France. Several dozen were tracked down, arrested and jailed, but they were all eventually released.

This is an area where the dividing line between politics and the law is blurred. The French public prosecutor's office can prevent an extradition, and the government has to accept its ruling. But if it rules in favour of extradition, its role is purely advisory: it is up to the prime minister to sign the order.

Apart from two orders that were signed, then cancelled, and the case of Paolo Persichetti, who is still under an expulsion order signed by Edouard Balladur in 1994, no prime minister has departed from the principle fixed by Mitterrand.

In September 1997 Italian exiles who had no French residence permit applied to be regularised. "We were looking forward to getting our permit as a Christmas present," said one of them. "Instead, they want to hang us from the Christmas tree."

What had happened in the meantime, on October 25, 1997, was that Italy officially signed up to the Schengen accords, which abolish frontiers between European Union member states.

Suddenly some 700 Italian police files were fed into the European computer system (SIS). Up to then, an international arrest warrant came into effect only after being transferred by the central French police department into the French data base of wanted persons. With Schengen, any warrant sent to the SIS by an Italian magistrate is the equivalent of a temporary arrest warrant in France.

"The problem can no longer be dealt with by doing nothing," said a French justice ministry source. "Nor can any deal be made between two countries. It's now almost automatic. That's what the European judicial space is all about."

The French prime minister's office is a little less enthusiastic about Schengen than the justice ministry: "First, we don't know the exact intentions of the Italian government. Then there are presidential pledges that have been respected up to now. Lastly, there are personal situations that need to be examined."

The prime minister, Lionel Jospin, is waiting for the result of negotiations with the Italian authorities. France has asked for "supplementary information" about the 10 Italian exiles on the SIS. This has had the effect of freezing arrest warrants.

Eleven former activists under threat have just written a letter to President Jacques Chirac and to Jospin asking for guarantees "capable of making our situation more secure". They say that they will not tolerate a "trickle of arrests" and that if one of them is extradited they will all follow that person to Italy so they can share "a common fate". In case it should come to that, the signatories of the letter, which has the support of several leading human rights campaigners, decided to give their names and addresses at the end of the letter.

The Italian government, meanwhile, is looking into the possibility of introducing an amnesty for former terrorists.

(March 3)

Le Monde
Directeur: Jean-Marie Colombani

John Carvel on why a diplomat or business executive heading for a new posting abroad might stop off first at a London college

Briefing encounter

THE School of Oriental and African Studies at London university is developing a nice little earner from marketing the expertise of its 220 academics as a briefing facility for companies and foreign governments.

If you are a senior diplomat taking up a new posting in the Middle East or a corporate executive considering a major investment in China or Japan, the school can provide a tailor-made package of specialists in the political, economic, legal and geographical aspects of your brief. Historical, artistic and archaeological perspectives can be thrown in for good measure, along with a discreet selection of names and phone numbers from the contacts books of Soas staff.

There is a long history of academics lending or selling their knowledge on a freelance basis to companies and governments — occasionally those hostile to the national interest. But Soas has taken the idea to its logical conclusion by setting up a Briefing Office to deliver personalised courses on most countries in the world.

Sir Tim Lankester, the former Whitehall mandarin who took over as the school's director in 1996, is bringing in about $400,000 a year from the operation and is looking to expand the turnover substantially. Added to income from linguistic services for companies and governments, he is managing to relieve some of the pain of recent funding cuts.

The Briefing Office model has obvious attractions for other prestige universities that could claim to be at the top of the league in particular disciplines. But the concept may work particularly well at Soas because of its historical traditions.

When the school was founded in 1916 it adopted a policy of running programmes for business and government to avoid becoming an academic ivory tower. British officials commonly went there for language training before taking up colonial postings and there were crash programmes in Japanese, Chinese and Arabic for the armed forces in the second world war. In more recent times the school provided the expertise for the British government when it suddenly discovered the economic importance of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse.

Since the 1980s the Swedish government has been sending its ambassadors for courses on the countries to which they were about to be posted. Arrangements were formalised when the Briefing Office was set up in 1995 and since then it has organised an induction for the ambassadors to Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Namibia and Iran. Tommy Arwitz, the Swedish ambassador to Syria, has returned to Soas this year to expand his knowledge of current developments in Lebanon and Iraq.

Graham Thomas, head of the Briefing Office, said his customers included Japanese firms based in Britain that needed their British staff to become acclimatised to Japanese business methods and office etiquette. They had to be taught that Japanese managers were not being deliberately rude when they reprimanded subordinates for failing to anticipate their superiors' unspoken wishes.

The Swedish ambassador to Damascus, Tommy Arwitz, and his wife Gun (facing) consult Middle East experts Dr Charles Tripp and Dr Rosemary Hollis at Soas in London PHOTOGRAPH: GRAHAM TURNER

The unit has been carrying out country risk assessments for a company contemplating moving into business in West Africa. It is also running a training programme for commercial lawyers from the People's Republic of China.

There is some mystery about the identity of an "important individual" connected with a Middle East government who is being given a personalised course lasting several months to "learn about the world", with special emphasis on economics and the power of the media. That sounds like the induction of a member of a royal family, but Mr Thomas would not confirm or elaborate.

He said Soas had not been obliged to lay down rules about when it would be inappropriate to brief a regime that the Government might regard as hostile. There had been no approaches from Saddam Hussein for briefing on how better to outsmart the West.

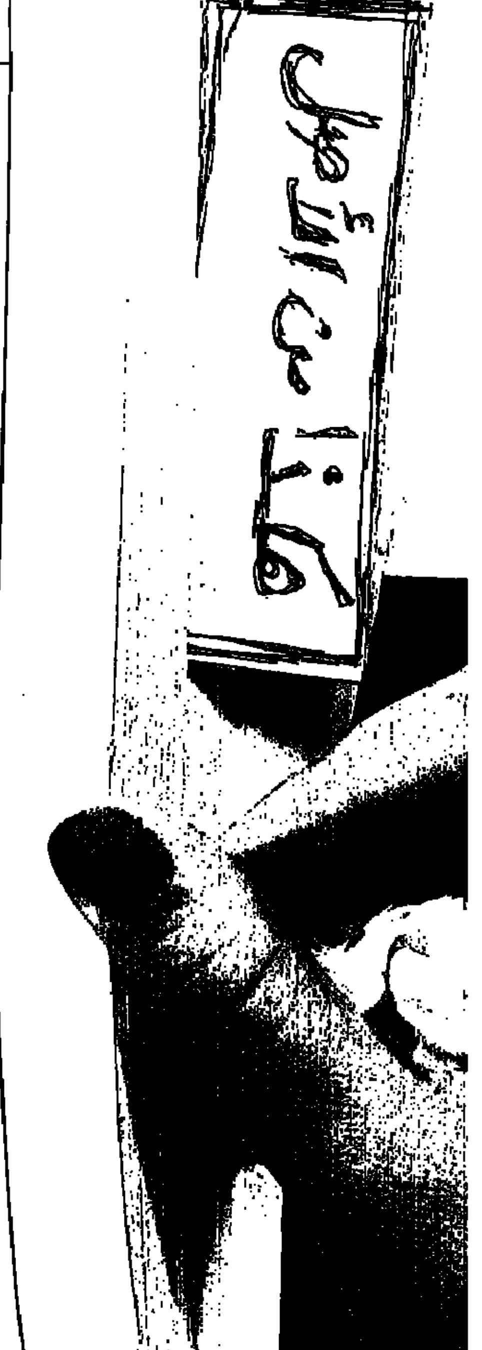
"Soas is often seen as neutral ground on which opposing arguments can be marshalled. We try to make our briefings as objective as possible. We are a university that has developed a capacity to brief on huge areas of the world, using our academic staff in a contemporary way," Mr Thomas said.











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EDUCATION ADVISER

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As programme director you will have overall responsibility for the management and strategic development of the programme and for ensuring that SCF contributes effectively to meeting the long and short term needs of the programme. You will work closely with other child focused organisations, partners and beneficiaries to promote understanding of our work and achieve shared aims.

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These posts are offered on a 25-month contract and have accompanied status. Salary should be tax free. You can also expect a good benefits package, including generous leave, accommodation and flights.

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Blood money

A Papua New Guinea tribe has discovered what it is like to be exploited. **Pauline Lane** reports

IN 1984 the Hagahai people, who live in the highland forests of Papua New Guinea, contacted the outside world for the first time. Some of them walked out of the bush for three days, requesting medical help.

One of the people who responded was Carol Jenkins, an anthropologist from the United States. Her intervention was to have a greater impact on the remote community than they could have imagined.

Jenkins took blood samples for medical diagnosis and the Hagahai benefited from the Western medicines that arrived in the community. But little did they know that some members' blood contained unique genetic characteristics (HTLV-1) that potentially offered resistance to a certain type of leukaemia. In particular, the cell line of an anonymous 28-year-old man contained a retro-virus that held the possibility of developing diagnostic screening kits and vaccines.

The US National Institute of Health (NIH), seeing the potential of this sample, patented the man's gene line. It meant that the US government owned a DNA sample from a non-US citizen.

Recently, I visited the Hagahai. They remember Jenkins with a mix of respect and anger. Yukotam Ibeji, one of their community leaders, said: "She wanted to see what kind of disease the Hagahai had. She would come and take blood. She wouldn't expect us to give our blood for nothing — she would give us soap and matches."

Sabu Lejel, another community leader, says no differentiation had been made between blood used for diagnosis and blood used for research. He said: "She just sent the medicine. We didn't know anything about the blood being sent away."

It appeared that the Hagahai had not given their informed consent for the blood samples to be used for extended research.

Ibeji said: "Some of the older people did ask what she was going to do with the blood and she said, 'You don't have to worry, I just want to see what kind of diseases you have, and then the people in town can send the right medicines.'"

The first time the Hagahai heard that their blood had been patented was when PNG journalists arrived by helicopter. The Rural Advancement Foundation International, an international NGO, had uncovered the patent and told the media.

Ibeji recalled the journalists' visit. He said: "They told us, 'You don't know but they are making money out of your blood.' They asked us if we had made money, and we told them we hadn't. We asked the anthropologist, but she said they were lying. But the talk keeps coming around."

The media exposure resulted in Jenkins being called to the PNG department of foreign affairs to account for her actions. The Hagahai were also asked to give evidence and, out of respect for their long relationship with her, they supported her work. The anthropologist was given permission to continue, but the trust of the Hagahai was shaken.

It was a turning point in the Hagahai's perception of the world. Today they feel cheated by what happened. The issue of money for blood has brought a new dynamic into what had been a cashless economy.

Due to international pressure, the NIH withdrew the patent, but the blood sample is still held under the Budapest Convention by the semi-private American Type Culture Collection, and can be accessed by anyone for a small fee.

The Hagahai have little chance of recompense, having no access to international courts. But they are not alone. Thousands of blood samples have been taken from indigenous groups without their knowledge and with no working records. Pharmaceutical companies trade indigenous DNA on the international market.

The first patent on human genes came in 1976, when John Moore, a US citizen, had his spleen removed due to cancer. When analysed, it was found that Moore's cell line had unique characteristics. The doctor patented the line and it was later bought by Sandor, a Swiss pharmaceutical company that has since made millions of dollars from a drug derived from the gene line. Moore challenged the decision in the Californian supreme court, which decided that citizens do not have any rights to their own cells once they have left the body. This has set a precedent for all future patents.

There is, effectively, no regulation on human gene prospecting and no international controls of the transfer of tissue samples between civilian and military researchers. Unesco's International Bio Ethical Committee is now drafting guidelines and an international declaration on human genetics for presentation at the United Nations this year.



The peaceful world of the Hagahai, from the highlands of Papua New Guinea, has been shattered by the gene line scandal PHOTO PAULINE LANE

Energy experts take a shine to the sun

The past year has seen an explosion in solar-powered projects, writes **Simon Jones**

WHAT does it take to start a revolution? Dire need? Political will? Strategic knowledge? Or financial muscle? All of the above, perhaps, and by these criteria a revolution is likely — soon.

The past year has seen an explosion in photovoltaics, which turn sunlight into electricity. Seen until recently as an expensive, Heath-Robinsonish joke, photovoltaic (PV) panels are going up all over the world, powering housing estates in Germany, an airport in Tuscany, United States government buildings, Japanese office blocks, and even a British factory. The Ford motor company will open a solar-powered factory in Bridgend, Wales, this month.

This is tiny compared with what may lie ahead. A fossil-fuelled world seems to have woken up to the potential of the giant thermonuclear reactor that beams down enough energy in half an hour to keep humanity going for a year. This market could reach $100 billion in a couple of decades, according to the electronics giant Siemens. Last year alone, world sales of solar panels shot up a record 42 per cent.

There is a moral imperative too. Business can make money while helping to save the planet, and governments can support industry and jobs while cutting CO_2 emissions — a double feelgood factor.

Japan has led the way. Two years ago it had virtually no solar-powered houses. Now the government is spending $205 million a year, and 70,000 solar roofs are planned by 2000. This has, in turn, galvanised Canon, Sharp, Sanyo, Mitsubishi and other electronics giants.

Spurred by the fear that Japan might knock the US off the top spot, Bill Clinton announced last June that the US should have a million solar roofs by 2010, and offered up to $2,000 subsidy per roof. The plan will save carbon emissions equivalent to those from 850,000 cars, and create 70,000 jobs.

Not to be outdone, the European Union has published a white paper urging a 100-fold boost to half-a-million solar roofs, creating 50,000 jobs. Germany (where the market has tripled since 1995), Switzerland, Italy and the Netherlands aggressively subsidise tens of thousands of solar-powered houses and offices. Greece is building the world's largest solar power station.

Britain lags far behind, planning to spend less than $5 million this year on research. There are only six solar houses connected to the grid, besides a handful of high-profile projects, including offices at Newcastle university, the Earth Centre in Yorkshire and a community centre in Hackney, east London.

But oil corporations seem to be conceding that environmentalists may have a point after all. One privately accepts Greenpeace's claim that if solar panels were fitted to all suitable buildings, they could generate two-thirds of Britain's electricity.

"There is a pretty unanimous view that by 2050 they will not be oil companies but renewable energy companies," said Robert Hill, director of Newcastle university's Photovoltaic Application Centre. "Those that do not diversify will be struggling. Also, by 2050, few regions of the world will have adequate supplies of fossil fuels. Unless we have alternatives, there will be world wars."

Some oil companies have sharply boosted their commitment to solar power. Shell hopes to capture 10 per cent of the world market, and is investing $500 million, while BP wants a $1 billion solar business within a decade. Its chief executive, John Browne, said recently: "There is no doubt there is sufficient sunlight to generate all the energy the world needs . . . and it is possible that, in 50 years' time, renewable energy could supply half."

Driving this growth is huge potential demand in the developing world. More than 2 billion people have no electricity and, for many, PV panels are far cheaper than connection to some distant grid. Brazil, Botswana, Kenya, India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand are just some of the countries involved.

Yet solar still represents a tiny part of energy use, and a fraction of BP and Shell's investment. The great obstacle is price: as long as it costs $40,000 to install solar panels on a British suburban house, demand will stay low, and manufacturers will not produce cheap panels.

Its growth in other countries is largely due to government incentives. These aim to set up a virtuous circle: boosted demand, bigger production, falling prices, more demand. Yet even without help, it is widely assumed that the price will be competitive with fossil fuels within a decade.

So, have the oil companies glimpsed the end of the oil era? Jeremy Leggett, solar energy fellow at Oxford and head of Solarcentury, a company that campaigns to commercialise it, thinks not. "They say solar has a great future, but they are still hanging back. Anyone who says we still need to wait is talking bullshit. We are limited only by our imagination."

Flush with triumph

Fred Pearce

***CHOLERA* stalks the shanty towns of Nairobi. But close behind is Manus Coffey's Vacutug — a simple machine for emptying the pit latrines that other pumps cannot reach. It could change the lives of tens of millions of shanty dwellers throughout the developing world.**

After two years of trials in Kibera, Nairobi's largest slum with a population of half a million people, the Vacutug is about go worldwide. It could hardly have had a tougher test. In Kibera some latrines are 10 metres deep, and each is shared by an average of 150 people.

Coffey, an Irish waste consultant, made the Vacutug himself two years ago, largely from second-hand car parts. It cost $1,500 and is powered by a single five-horsepower engine with a chain drive.

Switch it one way and the engine powers the two-wheeled machine round the tightest angle, at a sedate 5kmh. Switch it the other way and the engine powers a suction pump that can empty the sludgiest latrine into its 500-litre tank within a few minutes. The pump reverses to empty the full tank — usually down a manhole into the nearby city sewer.

"People used to empty latrines here with a bucket," says Clarice Moluma of the Kenya Water and Health Organisation (Kwaho), which operates a pump. "Tankers simply can't get into a place like this."

But with a wheelbase of 1.5m, Coffey's machine can work almost anywhere.

"We could use several more," says Moluma. "Since the floods here in January, all the latrines have got flooded. It's one reason why we have cholera."

Demand for the Vacutug's services is so great in Kibera that Kwaho recently upped its charge to $7 a load.

The income from the machine is currently paying the wages of six people, including two operators, a part-time repair man and two people who buy water in bulk from the city council and supply it to Kibera's residents.

Graham Alabaster at Habitat, the United Nations agency for urban problems which is based in Nairobi, is a firm believer in Coffey and his machine. "Most aid donors seem to have moved away from hard technologies like this," he says.

"They are more interested in sociology. But I think innovative technology is vital for slum settlements. And this device can improve the living conditions of tens of millions of urban poor."

Alabaster was so convinced that last month he approved funding for the construction of five more Vacutugs for trials around the world.

"I certainly don't claim exclusive rights in this machine," says Coffey. "Basically I just want people to copy it."

Letter from Châtaigneraie Peter Graham

Black propaganda

IF THE unseasonably mild weather continues in this part of the lower Auvergne, it won't be long before *responchons* start sprouting in the hedgerows. Responchons (pronounced "respountsou") is the local Occitan, or *langue d'oc*, word for black bryony, also known as lady's seal. The appearance of these edible shoots is keenly awaited by the inhabitants of the Aveyron *département*.

My first encounter with responchons came one spring morning at Villefranche-de-Rouergue's delightful market, which is held in its small arcaded central square. A bent old woman dressed in black was selling bunches of what she called *asperges sauvages*. As I was keen to sample a new vegetable, I bought a bunch of the shoots, which did indeed look like slender asparagus. Not long after my purchase, I was assailed by other market-goers who had spotted what I was holding and urgently wanted to know where I had bought them.

The *Aveyronnais* will spend hours scouring the hedgerows for the difficult-to-see shoots, which have to be picked before the plant begins twining round any stems and branches within reach, and quickly climbs to cover a considerable expanse of vegetation with its heart-shaped leaves and white flowers.

Curiously, this passion for picking and eating responchons is not shared by those who live in the neighbouring département of the Cantal. So the untouched Cantal hedgerows offer rich pickings for incoming Aveyronnais. This "invasion" is resented by the *Cantaliens*, even if they do not themselves fancy the vegetable. *Les douze* — as people driving cars with number plates ending in 12, the figure that denotes an Aveyron registration, are known in the Cantal — are suspected of every crime, from foraging in mushroom woods to picking lettuces, snaffling the occasional chicken and stealing wood. One Cantal farmer I know once went so far as to booby-trap his wood-pile as a precaution.

This interdepartmental difference of taste is symbolised by the village of St-Santin, which is unique in France in that it is divided down the middle into two communes, St-Santin-d'Aveyron and St-Santin-de-Maurs. The boundary separates not only the two communes but two départements (the Cantal and the Aveyron) and two administrative regions (the Auvergne and the Midi-Pyrénées).

The village has two churches (one Romanesque, one Gothic) and two village councils (one leftwing, one rightwing). Until recently, it also had two primary schools and two football teams. The new, amalgamated team is called *Entente* and plays on a pitch where one goal is in the Aveyron and the other in the Cantal. St-Santin has to make do with a single curate for its two churches. To avoid antagonising either camp, he holds mass alternately in each church.

A friend of mine who was born in St-Santin-d'Aveyron and moved recently a few hundred metres down the road to St-Santin-de-Maurs tells me that the village's schizophrenia also extends to the eating of responchons: one half of the village eats the vegetable, the other does not.

Does black bryony deserve the enthusiasm of the Aveyronnais? I have to say in all honesty that my great expectations of responchons were dashed when I tasted them: although they have a pleasant colour and texture, their taste is bitter and rather one-dimensional. To get rid of most of their bitterness, the Aveyronnais boil them in plenty of water, changing it at least once, and sometimes twice.

BLACK bryony (Tamus communis), which belongs to the yam family, has apparently been eaten since Roman times. Yet Richard Mabey, in Food For Free (1972), describes it as poisonous "when eaten in moderate amounts". Poisonous though it may be, black bryony is reputed to have medical properties. Potter's Cyclopedia Of Botanical Drugs And Preparations (1907) says: "The fresh root is scraped and the pulp rubbed into parts affected by gout, rheumatism, or paralysis . . . black bryony is a popular remedy for removing discolouration caused by bruises, hence its name — Blackeye Root." This property also no doubt explains its other Auvergnat name, *herbe aux femmes battues* (battered wives' herb).



Churchgoers on Lewis. Traditional industries are dying as the population shrinks

The sun sets on the Western Isles

John Arlidge

WHEN his classmates abandoned the Isle of Lewis and went to work in Inverness, Glasgow and Edinburgh, Lachlan Macinnes did anything and everything he could to stay in the Hebrides.

First he was a soldier, then he worked at a gents' outfitter in Stornoway, the island capital. He moved on to a petrol station, before selling life assurance. But next month he will bid farewell to his wife and three children and head for the mainland. It is 14 months since he lost his latest job, and he cannot find another.

Like generations of sailors, crofters, Harris Tweed weavers and fishermen, Macinnes is about to become an economic refugee. "I am a Lewis man and I don't want to go but I have to," he says. "I love it here but I have been looking and there is nothing. I'll miss the island; I don't know whether it will miss me."

Macinnes, aged 39, is one of a growing number of people abandoning the Hebrides. There is a long tradition of emigration, but in recent years the economy has dipped sharply and depopulation has increased.

Angus Graham, deputy leader of Western Isles Council, has watched with envy the success of other parts of the Highlands and Islands. "Inverness, Moray, Shetland, Orkney and Skye are booming, but we are not," he says.

He reels off statistics of a way of life trapped in decline. "In 1901 there were 46,000 people in the Western Isles, and now there are 29,000. Between 1951 and 1991 Harris lost almost 40 per cent of its people, and still they go."

Traditional industries have shrunk sharply. Once crofters supplemented their income by fishing and weaving Harris Tweed (which, despite its name, is largely produced in Lewis). These days the whirr of the loom rarely disturbs village life. Recent attempts by British designers such as Vivienne Westwood to repopularise the cloth have failed and the United States market has dried up. The number of weavers has fallen from around 400 in 1986 to 150 today.

The same goes for fishing. Photographs on Graham's office wall show Stornoway harbour lined with vessels. Today a handful of small trawlers set sail each morning, outnumbered five to one by the Spanish, French and other Scottish vessels that fish off the west coast of Lewis and Harris.

Everyone agrees that the big opportunity lies away from the islands — a kilometre beneath the Atlantic. Oil companies are already drilling west of Lewis and Harris, and Graham is determined that the base for the new exploration will be Stornoway. "We have a deep-water harbour and the biggest airport in the area," he says.

But will it be enough to lure Macinnes back? "I would love to return but it will take time," he says "If the oil sector expands I'll be back. But now I'm away on the ferry to get a job."

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

WHY, on encountering cold air, does my nose run?

BREATHING out water vapour is a good method for losing heat. If you are hot, one of the effects is to increase blood flow to the nasal linings, warming them, so that the warm moist air from the lungs leaves the body unchanged. If the surroundings are cold the heat-conserving strategies come into play and the nasal linings become cooler. Water condenses there, heat is returned to the body and the drip forms. — *David Bolton, Mosgiel, New Zealand*

WHY can't we all just love one another?

EVOLUTION has endowed us, along with our close relatives the gorillas and chimpanzees, with two relevant primal urges. We live in social groups prepared to defend a territory, and we form hierarchies within those groups. The groups were originally extended families (indeed the protection of a specific set of genes provided their evolutionary justification), but have grown to the size of countries.

Most wars arise from violations of territory, although civil wars happen when a country splits into two groups due to struggles within its hierarchy. When our perceived social groups do not correspond to our countries, the result is anything from simmering discontent to all-out war.

What we call love must have originated as a force to hold our groups together by ensuring the co-operative, mutually supportive behaviour that characterises our intra-group interactions. To this day, while we may extend hospitality to individual foreigners, we remain suspicious of them *en masse*.

Fortunately our primal urges can be overridden by our intelligence. It is not a coincidence that the best of us preach universal brotherhood, that is tolerance of those outside our group, and equality, meaning the overthrow of hierarchies. These are themes that reappear from Christ to Jefferson (excluding black people), to Lenin (excluding capitalists but including, in theory, women).

Nor is it a coincidence that those who advocate firm leadership, a strong military, racial purity, immigration controls and a form of capitalism that creates huge disparities in wealth are called conservatives, for they seek to conserve our urges no matter what our intelligence may say about them. Loving each other thus involves muzzling conservatives and improving education so that we can see the whole of humanity as our social group. — *Graham Andrews, Oregon, USA*

HOW did Action Man get that scar on his face?

KEN caught him canoodling with Barbie. — *Feargal McKay, Dublin, Ireland*

WHAT is the longest English word with no recurring letters?

FROM the vocabulary of computer programmers we have the word "backgroundpixels", which has 16 non-recurring letters. — *Charles T Fike, Bronxville, New York, USA*

WHO started the practice of celebrating victory by spraying champagne over everybody?

A BRITISH motor racing magazine recently reported that while champagne had been a part of the motor racing scene for many years, the practice of wildly spraying it first occurred by accident, in motor racing at least, at the 1966 Le Mans race. The victor's bottle, intended for pouring, had overheated in the sun and when opened by the winning manufacturer, Henry Ford himself, the "spray scene" was born. — *Ian Mackley, Caracas, Venezuela*

Any answers?

I READ somewhere that the US once contemplated going to war with Britain because Africans escaping slavery in the US had been sheltered on British territory. Is this true? — *Bryn Hughes, Wrexham*

WHAT is it that makes almost everyone find pleasure in popping the bubbles on bubble wrap? — *Claire Gascoigne, London*

WHEN was the last man "pressed" into the Royal Navy? — *Harold Adams, Canberra, Australia*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/+44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ. The Notes & Queries website is at http://nq.guardian.co.uk/

Men on the edge

What is the future for men? Are women leaving them behind? Who cares? **Dave Hill** looks for the answers

IT WOULDN'T do to be unfair to my own sex. True, we still interrupt too often, drive too recklessly, behave like great big babies when we don't get our own way — and worse. But only the worst of us don't accept, however grudgingly, the justice of the case for the equality of women. Agreed, we currently celebrate football, farting and fornication with unprecedented brazenness. But, by and large, we have come to concede that domestic labour is something with which we ought to get acquainted.

It is also true that those of us who go to bed with women have become more enlightened about sex. Indeed, a parallel can be drawn. Our relationship with the washing machine is similar to that with the clitoris: we may still have trouble understanding how it works, but at least we have discovered where it is.

So men have made progress during the past 30 years. The trouble is, it hasn't been progressive enough: not just for the good of women but also for our own good. While women have been recasting "his story" to make it their story as well, many men have put a finger in at least one of their ears. It is no coincidence that a modern mantra now insists that the future is female: as girls do better and better at school, boys trail behind; as women secure more and better jobs, men become intimate with the schedules of daytime TV; while men kill themselves with increasing frequency, women lead lives that are not only longer but often sweeter. And so on.

Men's response to the waves of change has frequently been feeble. It is time for us to make a brave new history of our own. That's "brave" and "new". Forgive the repetition, but you know how blokes don't listen. Most male engagements with the gender relations debate during the present decade have been self-serving, resentful and fearful that women are stealing men's trousers. In the United States, this nervousness about the erosion of male authority seeped into the most famous book about the modern male condition, Robert Bly's Iron John, and into the Million Man March on Washington. In Britain a harsher variation drives the vociferous "men's rights" movement, that energetic network of wounded males who sup long and deep from their foaming mugs of umbrage and speak of feminism as a social disease.



It is easy to dismiss all this as nothing more than a predictable backlash, but it isn't quite that simple. The inconvenient truth is that while some men have embraced or accommodated the advances of women, others see themselves as the victims of those advances. Even more inconveniently, they sometimes have a point. And who is taking them seriously? Writers such as Bly and the groups in the "men's rights" movement. It is these people who have run with the issues raised by the "crisis of masculinity".

Meanwhile those whose sympathies lie with feminism, men and women alike, have reacted with unease and suspicion. The impulse is understandable, but that doesn't make it right. For although the brave new history men need to compose can be productive only if it goes with rather than against the flow of feminism, it would be daft to hand the other side a monopoly on concern for those men who have real fears and genuine grievances.

These ticklish issues are disfigured by rhetoric and rage. The temperature rises in particular over the vexed question of men as fathers. In the age of widespread family breakdown, we are right to feel dismay over the large numbers of men who lose contact with their children and fail to support them. But the reasons for this vary and are heavily influenced by society's bogus belief that mothers are nature's superior nurturers. Campaigners for "fathers' rights" complain that this is reflected in an unlikely alliance of fuddy-duddy judges and an anti-man child welfare culture that causes most separated fathers simply to give up because they are convinced the system would favour the mother. That is debatable. But it is certainly true that courts rarely return "shared residence" judgments, which would enable children to maintain close relationships with both biological parents. Absent fathers are often culpable, but they can be wrongly excluded, too.

The most depressing feature of the public conversation (or the bickering that passes for one) about the relationship between the sexes has been the absence of male voices subscribing to the quaint, old-fashioned idea that the liberation of women can help unshackle men, too.

Men sympathetic to feminism fail to join in for various reasons. One is that too many editors, publishers and producers of radio phone-ins see more advantage in continuing the "sex war" than in exploring ways to build the peace. Then there is the fear of someone hissing "sissy". (Or traitor, or fool.) Another reason is a reluctance to trespass on territory that was reclaimed and cultivated by women in the first place. There is also concern that women will take a cynical view of men's motivations. These are reasonable fears. But they need to be risen above. One of the great gains of feminism has been the validity bestowed on matters of the heart and home. But as women continue to make inroads into "men's worlds", the domestic realm is becoming of more importance to men as well.

This is not to yearn for a tomorrow in which bankers and bricklayers alike spend half their lives bemoaning their testosterone and filling bins with sodden man-sized tissues. It is simply to suggest that men need to do what women have taught them: to solve their own mysteries, learn the lessons of their pasts and take their futures boldly, generously and imaginatively into their own hands.

Quick, quick, slow

DANCE
Judith Mackrell

THERE aren't many performances of modern dance for which the music ranges as wide as Rameau, Britten and contemporary German composer Heiner Goebbels. But the **Richard Alston Dance Company's Triple Bill** at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall shows that music has always been the mind and heart of Alston's choreography, and in Red Run, set to the Goebbels score, he finds its soul, too.

The music, performed live by London Sinfonietta, is dark and traumatised — orchestrated by scrubby, dissonant cello, low, dangerous brass and urgent electric guitar. Exclamations of pain and foreboding yield to passages of uncertain quiet, and from this edgy soundscape Alston's dance re-discovers the tense, unpredictable energy that marks his greatest work.

Kicking, slicing moves are summoned from the dancers' darkest depths and hang quivering in space, as if resisting the momentum that's pushing them forward. A lone woman skims tautly over the music while a man shadows her steps with a fierce, weighted grace — treble and bass, light and dark.

Individual dancers launch on to their own maverick paths, even while being contained by the magnetic field of the ensemble, so that the whole work exists in a perfect tension between order and chaos, clamour and stillness.

It is danced with fine ferocity by a company that looks, suddenly, bold and wise beyond its years.

There's an eloquent ambiguity, too, in Rumours, Visions (1996), which evokes the life of Rimbaud through Britten's song cycle Illuminations. Thus the poet (Martin Lawrance) is wide-eyed and vulnerable, his body tracing confident, questing moves even as it trembles receptively to everything around it. His duets with Verlaine (Henri Ogulke) radiate a classical perfection — two poets singing to each other — even though their eyes stalk each other and rage. Both works show Alston finding a tension between narrative and form that's the deepest conduit for his own emotion.

Brisk Singing, set to music from Rameau's opera Les Borades, is simply passionate about dance and extracts a ravishing variety from its score. Airborne turns catch the light, bodies arc in slow contemplation, arms inflect joyously fluid phrases with witty angles, and feet drum in larky unison.

Moment by moment, it is extremely beautiful, but it lacks a powerful argument. Lulled by its pleasures, you long to see this wash of glorious movement crammed into a frame and put under pressure — its steps shoved into higher ridges and deeper furrows and the whole given more urgent shape.

Religion and anatomy lie on the dissecting table in Yolande Snaith's latest show, **Blind Faith** at London's The Place. Inspired by the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci, but mediated through sharply modern design, it presents man as both object of scientific scrutiny and seeker of spiritual truth.

The whole piece is danced around a huge table, and the first shockingly abrupt image reveals a near-naked man splayed across it — either Christ removed from the cross or a corpse laid out for examination. The other four dancers inspect him with the callous authority of doctors or priests, then, via Snaith's brilliantly surreal leaps of visual logic, we watch the company ascend erratically through the Chain of Being. They become animals snuffling for food, lovers searching for erotic knowledge, visionaries crouched over glowing light.



Dramatic tension . . . Alston's dancers in Red Run PHOTO: LAURIE LEWIS

Graeme Miller's soundtrack and Barnaby Stone's set underline these changes, as Snaith trampolines on the table's supple surface, trying to levitate herself to heaven, or as light streams through hidden vents like grace ascending.

Snaith's choreography is her usual blend of blunt, repeating turns and free-flowing partnering. There are some sluggish, over-extended sequences where the thread of her imagination goes slack. Yet punctuating these moves are Leonardo's poses, with their sensuously moulded limbs and expressive curves. And out of these, the show gathers together for a masterly close.

The dancers start to morph into figures from the Last Supper fresco. Palms are flattened into gestures of saintliness, arms reach out in appeal. Yet the dancers keep melting from one pose to another, as if the fresco, coming to hallucinatory life, is slipping out of our vision. In paying homage to the beauty of the fresco, Snaith also marks our distance from its passionate concerns.

Lead role in a star dynasty

OBITUARY
Lloyd Bridges

ALTHOUGH the rugged, blond actor Lloyd Bridges, who has died aged 85, had been in dozens of movies since 1941, he had to wait more than three decades to achieve substantial fame. Curiously, this came about because he was the father of bigger stars, Beau and Jeff Bridges, and because he parodied his own poker-faced macho persona in spoofs such as Airplane (1980).

The success of these post-1980 performances derived from his playing it straight, as if he believed in the crazy goings-on around him. In fact, his stiff, humourless acting style differed very little from that in the string of action pictures of his pre-Airplane days. The joke was even better for those who remembered Bridges's far-fetched heroics in the TV series Sea Hunt.

Not so funny was his blacklisting. This came during the era of Senator Joseph McCarthy's red scare during the early 1950s. Eventually Bridges succumbed and appeared as a "friendly" witness — one who co-operated — before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee. This meant that he named names of other potential leftists and admitted to having been a member of the United States Communist Party briefly during the 1940s.

This penitential act enabled him, as it did others, to resume his busy acting career, which had begun in the 1930s, after he had taken a law degree at the University of California Los Angeles. He and the actress Dorothy Simpson, whom he married in 1939, went east and performed in stock companies, where he was spotted by a producer for Columbia Pictures and given a contract in 1941.

In four years at Columbia he walked through 14 features, including several in the studio's Lone Wolf and Boston Blackie series, played stooge to Joe E Brown and Abbott and Costello, and was one of the assorted desert rats under Sergeant Humphrey Bogart in Sahara (1943). On going freelance in 1945 not much changed, with Bridges as one of assorted GIs in a platoon in Italy in Lewis Milestone's A Walk In The Sun. However, the films were getting better, and his roles slightly bigger.

He soon found a niche as a stolid, handsome heavy — often baring his chest, in westerns — obstructing heroes Dana Andrews in Canyon Passage (1946), Joel McCrea in Ramrod (1947) and Randolph Scott in Colt 45 (1950). In The White Tower (1950) Bridges was at his most convincingly obnoxious as an arrogant ex-Nazi on a mountain expedition, who despises Glenn Ford's decadent democratic principles. In the same year, in The Sound Of Fury, he played a brutish kidnapper who kills his victim in cold blood before being lynched by a mob.

Bridges: humourless style led to new career in self-parody

One of his few redeemable characters was in Home Of The Brave (1949), the first Hollywood movie to deal overtly with racial prejudice, Bridges being the only buddy of a black soldier in a five-man group on a Japanese-held island. It was produced by Stanley Kramer and written by Carl Foreman, both of whom went on to make High Noon (1952). In this classic western Bridges played Marshall Gary Cooper's deputy, who refuses to support his superior against a group of gunmen, out of both jealousy and cowardice. There is a bitter irony in the fact that the film made an intentional analogy with McCarthyism.

It was soon after completing The Rainmaker (1956), in which he played spinster Katharine Hepburn's obdurate brother, that he landed the role of Mike Nelson, the former Navy frogman in the underwater adventure TV series Sea Hunt that made him a household name. After four years of tackling sharks, both animal and human, and rescuing people from perils at sea, Bridges announced he was leaving the show. "They wanted more cops and robbers," he explained. "I wanted to look at the real villains of the sea, like the oil companies."

In addition to his acting, Bridges was active in the support of many social and environmental causes and, in 1988, he headed a mission to investigate starvation in sub-Saharan Africa. By this time he had embarked on his new self-parodic career, launched by Airplane, in which he was the chain-smoking, heavy-drinking ground control official. This was followed by Airplane II: The Sequel (1982).

In June 1992 Bridges underwent open-heart surgery, but was back at work in six weeks on Hot Shots Part Deux (1993) playing the sort of crazy American officer that makes both friends and foes quake with fear.

Bridges, who leaves his wife, two sons, a daughter and 11 grandchildren, recently completed two forthcoming features, Jane Austin's Mafia and Meeting Daddy, the latter with his elder son Beau.

Ronald Bergan

Lloyd Bridges, actor, born January 15, 1913; died March 10, 1998

Jack by numbers

CINEMA
Richard Williams

JACK NICHOLSON'S **output in recent years has given the appearance of being designed to capitalise on the popular caricature rather than to extend the range of a major talent. But to judge from the advance publicity, not to mention the Oscar nomination, you might imagine that his portrayal of Melvin Udall in As Good As It Gets is an addition to the list of his most distinguished performances.**

It isn't. This is another helping of Jack by numbers, in which the rogueish charm is pushed to the crowd-pleasing limit as Nicholson manoeuvres his face's three lateral variables — eyebrows, eyes and mouth — into a geometry of comic menace and malevolence, thrown into cartoonish relief by the vast expanse of forehead above.

Udall, a Manhattan novelist and nightmare neighbour, is a fine comic creation by the director, James L Brooks, and his co-scenarist, Mark Andrus.

The point about Udall is his unprovoked, unmediated rudeness, and there isn't an actor alive who could deliver his lines with as much lethal relish as Nicholson — even when the only audience is a cat. ("This is New York," he informs the offending feline as he removes it from his apartment building in a spectacularly callous way. "If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere.")

But Udall doesn't just hate cats. He doesn't just hate Jews, blacks and gays, either. His misanthropy admits no prejudice. Only Carol (Helen Hunt), the waitress who serves him his daily breakfast special, is given a conditional exemption.

While the picture is humming along in this manner, for the first half-hour, it's hard to resist the exhilaration engendered by such an uncompromising assault on common decency. When a fan of his romantic novels asks him how he manages to write such convincing women characters, Udall doesn't miss a beat: "I think about men. And I take away reason and accountability."

What's the distinction between laughing at that, from Nicholson, and turning away from Bernard Manning's jokes about women and Pakis? Only the perceived sophistication of the teller, I suppose. That's a weak response to an interesting question, but we're only just beginning to engage with it when Udall, and the movie, turns soft.

Udall, we learn, is not really a natural-born misanthrope but is suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder, whose symptoms can be alleviated by taking pills. Slowly the monster begins to return to human form. And, inevitably, he becomes rather less fun for the audience to be with.

In what is, at heart, just another sentimental Hollywood movie, what stays with us is the Oscar-nominated performance of Helen Hunt's pale, preoccupied, single-parent waitress, who seems like an emissary from the real world.

Traffic jam in the tunnel of love

TELEVISION
ncy Banks-Smith

…SED to see the last totter on the Thames. This rag-and-bone man …the river would row upstream and …ch his boat where the Thames …ls round the Isle of Dogs, drop…g driftwood and pallets. He'd …e and go and then, one day, he …n't come any more.

There's something disturbing …out a job like that. You feel there's …re below the waterline than …s above it. Wordsworth would …ve written a very long poem on …n. When the river was thick with …ipping, there must have been rich …ckings for rag-and-bone men. To…acco from Tobacco Wharf, bananas …m Canary Wharf, bobbing …nges like fishing-net floats and, of course, corpses. Which are also rags and bones.

Our Mutual Friend (BBC2) begins with a bearded man and a hooded woman in a rowing boat on the Thames. It is night. On the prow is one weak light. Astern they are towing a dead body. As opening chapters go, it is, as Mr Boffin puts it later, a spanker.

Picking up corpses is Gaffer Hexam's trade, but it is an occupation that suggests something far older and more shadowy. Charon who ferried the dead to hell. The river itself carries a heavy freight of symbolism, but effortlessly, the way the river carries all weights.

Our Mutual Friend is much possessed by death. One of the most taking exchanges is between Venus (Timothy Spall), a skeleton-maker, and Wegg (Kenneth Cranham), who's lost a leg. Well, not lost it, exactly. The skeleton-maker has it. He is proud of his craft. "If you was brought here loose in a bag, I could name your smallest bones blindfold and sort them all in a manner that would surprise and charm you." Why, he adds, pay West End prices?

Peter Vaughan, who is so associated with villainy that I once saw him empty a London Underground carriage by getting in it, is cast successfully against type as the infinitely affable Boffin.

By the end of episode one Hexam himself is dead, towed home behind his own boat. There was a wonderful shot of Rogue Riderhood (David Bradley), the sort of crook who gives crime a bad name, crouched like a cormorant beside the water waiting for his fish to come in.

Hexam's death releases the second of two heroines on to the marriage market. Bella (Anna Friel) was engaged to marry the first corpse and Lizzie (Keeley Hawes) was the daughter of the other.

The weather is ghastly, particularly in the East End. The rich, as is only right, enjoy cloudless skies. **Pleasure Beach** (BBC1), or all the fun of the fair, ended exuberantly with a normal sort of day: "complete and utter and total disaster!" There was the usual traffic jam in the Tunnel of Love, the usual hyperventilating passengers stranded halfway to heaven and the assistant manager was encouraging little children with word and gesture: "I'll bash yer head in!" However, tonite folks, for one nite only, there is gunslinging, too.

The lad who had been shot was reassuringly vocal. "I've seen two people wi' guns today. This other one pulled the gun out like that, and I went, 'Go on, then! Shoot me! Shoot me!' And he put it away. 'Go on, then! If you've got a gun, use it!', and he just didn't use it at all. So I went, 'Go on, then, use it! You've got the gun to use it, so use it!' And he didn't use it."

Hang on, son. Let's see if I got this straight. You said "Go on, use it!" and he didn't use it. Right?

I particularly enjoyed the Scottish shoplifter found in possession of a squirrel (though he claimed he found the bleeping thing). It was, I should add, a pottery squirrel. He hurled spirited, if largely unintelligible, menaces at Bert and Bill, his gaolers, from behind his cell door. "Do you know David Butcher?" "No." "Do you know Unintelligible Walsh?" "No." "Do you know Lee Humphries?" "No." "You'll be meeting them next week! Trust me!" Bert and Bill chuckled dishearteningly. When the police frisked the prisoner, they found two air fresheners from his cell.

Alas, poor Escher

RT
lfred Hickling

MC ESCHER was a man with the mind of a computer who married his wife according to a mathematical formula ("the age of the ideal spouse should be half that of the man plus 10"). This was typical of the Dutch printmaker who, a century after his birth, is known for everything except his art.

No artist, with the exception of E's near-contemporary Mondrian, has been responsible for a greater volume of useless objects. But whereas no amount of ashtrays and …sh mats can detract from the original Mondrians hanging in every major modern art collection in the world, Escher has dwindled into his own ephemera.

Had Escher not existed, some geek would have programmed him. Boffins adore Escher. Indeed, heading the list of Escher moneyspinners is the Escher interactive CD-Rom, which takes you on a virtual detour of his trademark towers of perpetual staircases and upward-flowing aqueducts.

None of this is to suggest that Escher couldn't draw — far from it. Perhaps the most famously well-observed pair of hands in Western art, after Dürer's study of the slender fingers of Erasmus, are those Escher depicted emerging out of a piece of paper, each engaged in the act of drawing the other. The problem with Escher is that he's too clever for his own good. Whereas Dürer's studies for Erasmus are priceless, Escher's original hand-job …y currently on display at the Cartwright art gallery in Bradford, until April 13, playing second fiddle to reproductions of itself in the souvenir shop.

Escher is the artist everyone knows and no one wanted to buy. When Steve Manthorp, assistant keeper of exhibitions at Bradford's Cartwright Hall Museum, began compiling this first Escher retrospective, he discovered that none of the artist's works existed anywhere in Britain. Directors of the country's major print collections received him like a man who had come to the wrong place. "Well, he is a bit of a …ilty, isn't he?" remarked one, …theringly.

Despite blanket derision from the fine art establishment, Manthorp doggedly pursued trails as fruitless as his subject's designs.

In fact, most of the original Eschers, comprising some 300 prints and 500 drawings, are still in one place. The entire oeuvre was passed on after his death in 1974 to the Escher Archive holding at the Haags Gemeentesmuseum in the Hague. It has been a no-go area for art historians ever since.

It takes a certain type of curator to swim against such indifference and go with the popular flow. Manthorp is a maverick, but he knows a thing or two about marketing. While Escher comes nowhere in standard art histories, he's big news on the National Curriculum. Up to five school parties doing tessellation projects troop through the exhibition daily.

About 30 per cent of the exhibits have never been on public display before. You are invited to poke around the CD-Rom, turn your hand to a bit of Euclidean geometry, observe yourself disappearing into infinity in a wilderness of mirrors, or to squint into peep-shows in which a team of architects has employed sleight of hand to realise Escher's buildings in three dimensions.

Manthorp must have introduced more anoraks to art galleries than any other curator in the country. "Escher does tend to attract the ritual obsessives," he admits. "Escher fans like order, they are attracted to microcosms. I think he holds great appeal for model railway enthusiasts."

Escher has always enjoyed massive acclaim from mathematicians. His father was a hydraulic engineer who wanted his son to become an architect. But Escher's tutor at the Haarlem School of Art persuaded him to channel his phenomenal, if resolutely conservative, ability as a draughtsman into a career in graphic art.

Double take . . . 'I don't know what sort of artist I am,' said Escher. 'In fact, I don't even know what art is.' Below left, Balcony, a typical visual paradox

Escher's earliest prints borrowed angular ideas from Cubism in a way that suggested he might have had something in common with the Vorticists, had he not experienced an epiphany on visiting the Alhambra at Granada in 1922. The awesome intricacy of 13th century Islamic tiling set Escher on a course he pursued for the rest of his life. He began to compress his meticulously observed human and animal figures into increasingly complex tessellation, forever finding new ways of making images perpetuate themselves.

At this point, Escher and the art establishment parted company for ever. "I don't know what sort of artist I am," Escher proclaimed. "In fact, I don't even know what art is." Yet at the same time, the doors of the maths faculties worldwide were thrown open. For mathematicians, Escher became something of an idol. Here was a person with the ability to draw freehand representations of the most sophisticated geometric problems. The strange redundancy of all this, of course, is that anything Escher could do, a computer can now do quicker.

But then Escher was never exactly an innovator, but rather an exceptional medium for abstract thought. The visual paradox commonly referred to as the "Escher triangle" wasn't invented by Escher at all. Its first appearance, in a design by Oscar Reutersvard, was brought to Escher's attention by two of his admirers, the world-renowned mathematicians L S and R Penrose in the British Journal of Psychology in 1934. Escher went on to exhaust every conceivable permutation of the beguilingly impossible triangle for the rest of his career.

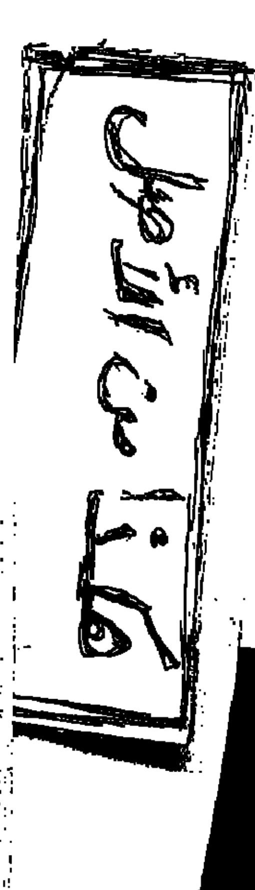
IN LATER life his reputation took a divergent course: on the one hand lecturing to the world's mathematical élite, on the other being plagiarised for Mott the Hoople album covers. Both have scuppered Escher's posthumous standing within the fine art establishment.

"It might have been better for his reputation had Escher been a complete failure," says Manthorp. "The art world likes to make its sensational discoveries. But the fact that he became the preserve of maths professors and West Coast hippies put paid to that.

"I suspect the attraction is a bit like Tolkein or taking acid — it's welded to hormones in an inexplicable way. It's something you either experience before a certain age or else the mystique loses much of its power."

There's no reason why Escher should be resuscitated as a significant figure, though at times it is difficult to judge why Magritte is a fine artist and Escher isn't. Both drew attention to the status of art as a visual deception, allied to a meticulous, but basically conservative technique. The images of both exude an air of heavy ennui that becomes terrifically boring when viewed *en masse*. But it does appear that Escher thought up the image of a human face peeled like an apple long before Marc Quinn's skin-as-rind metaphors in the Sensation show in London last year.

Escher's imagery is easy to dismiss, difficult to ignore. I couldn't prevent myself peering for a long time into Ascending, Descending, his doleful depiction of purgatorial souls on the spiral stairway to nowhere. So long, in fact, that the lights had been turned off, and a security guard had begun issuing directions to the exit. "It's in the basement: you go down the first flight of stairs, then the second and third. Basically, you just keep turning right." If only Escher's universe were quite so straightforward.



In the spirit of the carnival

Giles Foden

The Dictionary of Global Culture
ed Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr
Penguin Press 717pp £25

WE BETRAY ourselves more clearly in works of reference than in other literary productions; perhaps it is something to do with the hubris of attempting to be comprehensive, all-seeing. So it is that the Encyclopedia Britannica, established in 1768 as the British Empire got under way, displays what are now thought to be classic "orientalist" perspectives: crudely put, it takes a one-sided view of other cultures while hoping to be panoptic.

Classically trained, the makers of the Britannica paid heed to the origins of their venture, the Greek phrase in which the word encyclopedia finds its root — *eukyklios paedia*, the circle of learning. In the ancient era this circle encompassed all that one was meant to know, from astronomy to poetry to herbal remedies.

By the end of the 19th century thousands of other subjects were at issue, as specialism bifurcated into sub-specialism, as different areas of knowledge became both more professionalised and more widely dispersed, and as European intellectuals sought to impose order after the revolutionary ructions of 1848.

It was a doomed venture, the systems failed. Many centuries before Yeats's "the centre cannot hold", cracks had begun appearing in the circumference of the Western circle of knowledge — even as it was being defined, often with information "plundered" from non-Western cultures.

It is these cracks that form the substance of Penguin's new Dictionary Of Global Culture, which claims to be "the first authoritative overview of global culture to emphasise the achievement of the non-Western world".

Edited by America's most distinguished professors of Afro-American Studies, Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr, it essentially applies the strictures of affirmative action to reference book entries, showing how "the periphery" has not only enriched the notional Western "centre" but militantly determined it.

Social mission and cultural bias have long been at the heart of the making of reference books. Appiah and Gates say they have called their book a dictionary rather than an encyclopedia "to remind you that it cannot do the job of explaining to you the whole world of any culture, let alone cover the culture of the whole world".

And yet this is really what they are trying to do, having elicited suggestions from scholars worldwide as to the most significant elements of their cultures: individuals, religions, art forms, customs, artefacts and historical events are just some on the roster.

Music seems to be important (punk, King Sunny Ade, gamelan, zydeco). So do musical instruments: the erhu (the Chinese fiddle) is here, and so is the sitar. But of the guitar not a twang can be heard. Sports and sportspersons also figure prominently: Pele, tlachti (an ancient Mayan ball game), baggataway — the Iroquois prototype for lacrosse. But look in vain for football, the ultimate global sport.

As for books, Milton is in and the Bible too ("the ideas and moral codes contained in it are extremely pervasive"), but neither is seen to be more significant than — breathless upon the heels of each other — the Ramakien (Thai epic poem), the Ramayana (Indian epic poem) or the Ream Ker (Cambodian epic poem).

The intentions of The Dictionary Of Global Culture are self-evidently laudable: it returns ignored or oppressed cultures to prominence. Yet it is hard to see how it will be used as a reference book *per se*. It is perhaps no wonder that entries are not cross-referenced: rather the whole thing is a cross-reference. That is in the nature of the beast — an epistemological project with the avowed intention of chronicling a vast confusion of epistemologies is bound to end up confused — and really this book's value lies in its own status as a cultural artefact.

On that view, it represents carnival rather than chaos — a celebration of unity-in-diversity acting, as the book's own entry on carnival puts it, "as a cathartic safety valve that allows often powerless celebrants to momentarily release the pent-up frustration of their daily lives".

On another view, as cultures struggle for breath, a reader of any nationality might feel like the Portuguese poet Camões, whose entry tells us how — shipwrecked off Goa — he is said to have swum to shore holding the manuscript copy of his great poem The Lusiads above his head. Nowadays, when you can't take one thing at a time, he doubtless would have drowned under a weight of assorted books.

Smitten with celebrity

Robert McCrum

Truman Capote
by George Plimpton
Picador 498pp £20

AMERICAN writers are different. Consider New York on the evening of November 28, 1966. At the Plaza Hotel that night, a 42-year-old writer hosted a black-and-white masked ball, in honour of Katharine Graham, the owner of the Washington Post and celebrated Beltway hostess. The guests, who were drawn from America's most powerful and glamorous top drawer, included Frank Sinatra, Norman Mailer, Douglas Fairbanks Jr and Henry Ford. Many of them had been talking about and preparing for this occasion for weeks. "We're going to Truman's ball," they would say. Not Capote's, Truman's.

It's hard, now, in the age of lifestyle supplements and rock'n'roll celebrity to imagine how seriously famous it was possible for a writer to be in the sixties. All the more so if you happened to be an American writer. At that particular moment, as he greeted his guests at the Plaza, Truman Capote was on top of the world: to write in the English language, and to be published in New York, was to guarantee a level of global recognition previously undreamt of. He had just published his self-styled "non-fiction novel" In Cold Blood, the mesmerising account of the brutal murder of a Kansas farming family, the Clutters, by a couple of recidivist punks.

He was acclaimed both in Britain, and throughout Europe. He had achieved what only a handful of writers achieve: the commercial frisson of a mass, popular audience and the literary gravitas that comes from the respect of the critics. If you happened to be one of the 500-odd people invited to "Truman's ball" you were the insider's insider, and probably as close as it was possible to be to the molten heart of fashion-conscious America.

The Icarus who had flown so close to the sun of literary fame was, by any measure, an extraordinary figure. To his Southern neighbour Harper Lee, who made him "Dill" in To Kill A Mockingbird, he was "a pocket Merlin". To others, he was a very short Southern homosexual with an affected, high-pitched southern diction that some found quite off-putting. And yet he had the perverse charm of the court jester.

One of the guests at the Plaza that night was the young George Plimpton. An entertaining, and mischievous, American writer, Plimpton was for many years the editor of the Paris Review.

Capote was an intensely social animal, a brilliant and instinctive gossip who used his charm to overcome his peculiar appearance and his even more peculiar speech. At the height of his career, perhaps on the night of his famous ball, Capote was at the point where all that was most glamorous in the arts and politics and society were united in a blaze of cosmopolitan brilliance. Capote seemed to know everyone. It was his fate, as a hugely successful American writer, to become distracted by his glamorous acquaintances from his calling as a writer, ending up in isolation and alcoholism, consumed by the febrile demands of celebrity.

Plimpton's collage of reminiscence is apt enough for its subject, and fascinatingly (and bitchily) evocative of the man, but it falls a long way short of being a proper biography, not that it pretends to be one. In the world of oral biography, the Black-And-White Ball gets as many pages as Capote's early years. To be fair, Plimpton does give the essence of Capote's row with the Observer's Kenneth Tynan, whose review of In Cold Blood accused Capote of making $2 million out of the execution of the Clutters' murderers when, Tynan suggests, he could have assisted in their appeal, perhaps to the detriment of his narrative.

Such deficiencies hardly matter. As the book's frisky, parodic subtitle ("In Which Various Friends, Enemies, Acquaintances and Detractors Recall His Turbulent Career") suggests, the bare bones are here — his troubled relationship with his mother, his flight from the oppressive south to New York, his apprenticeship as a writer, the publication of Other Voices, Other Rooms and, later, of Breakfast At Tiffany's, the research process that went into the making of In Cold Blood and, finally, as a kind of climax, three fascinating chapters on the Black-And-White Ball.

I say "climax", and though at this point we are barely halfway through, there was no second act to this life. Like many acclaimed American writers, from F Scott Fitzgerald on, Capote was burnt by success. After the trailblazing publication of In Cold Blood, his inspiration failed, and he wrote less and less. When Capote died suddenly in 1984 his literary executors searched in vain for the manuscript. All they found were some highly decorated "snakebite kits", and the instruction DO NOT PANIC.

Capote: burnt by success

PHOTO: EVERETT COLLECTION

Back from the brink

Mick Imlah

The Lost Lunar Baedeker
by Mina Loy
ed Roger L Conover
Carcanet 256pp £9.95pbk

NOT to be confused with Myrna Loy, the "Queen" of Hollywood, the poet Mina Loy was herself, in a different sphere, a figure of legendary potential.

Born in Hampstead in 1882, she lived successively in Florence, New York, Paris, New York again, and Aspen, Colorado. Beautiful and reckless, a "nervy impuritan", she was taken up by the avant-garde on both sides of the Atlantic, and makes colourful appearances in the memoirs or biographies of Djuna Barnes, Brancusi, Marcel Duchamp, Hemingway, Freud, James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Marianne Moore and Ezra Pound — who found her edgy, sarcastic poems to epitomise the poetic mode of logopeia, the "dance of the intellect among words".

Yet somehow Mina Loy escaped being famous. She published only two books in her lifetime, and seemed indifferent to their reception, responding to praise, when it came, with mockery. There were many lovers and two husbands, the second a heavyweight boxer who was murdered in Mexico within a few months of the wedding; but in later life Loy grew reclusive and eccentric, ministering to the alcoholics who slept in the streets around her rooming-house near the Bowery. Since her death in 1966, her reputation has been out in the cold.

Is this just? For Roger Conover, in his heartfelt introduction to this new edition of her works, Loy is a "great poet", even "the poet of the century". The Lost Lunar Baedeker — an irksome play on the title of Loy's 1923 collection, Lunar Baedeker — contains all bar a handful of her shorter pieces. Now that Conover has given us the material to assess her fairly, she seems to have deserved neither a half-century out of print nor the over-correction of his own steepling estimate.

Loy is not, as Conover acknowledges, an instantly welcoming poet. The earliest poems in particular now seem remote as well as difficult. Contemporary readers were disturbed by their preoccupation with sex; her first husband, Stephen Haweis, is said to have warned her: "keep writing that way, Mina Haweis, and you'll lose your good name"; she divorced him. Today's reader is more likely to be put off by the poetry's spiky, uncongenial, exhibitionist manner. Conover jokes that the things needed to read Loy "with profit" are "patience, intelligence, experience, and a dictionary".

Yet Loy's personal misfortunes seem to have purged her poetry of its facetious glamour; in the work of her middle age, a genuinely original poetic personality emerges. Her youthful war against gentility has matured into an imaginative attachment to the people of the street: an empathy with, or even sympathy for, their degradation, but a morally neutral project to find holiness in unexpected places, to make "raffish saints" of stinking alcoholics.

It is this part of Loy's writing, her apotheosis of faceless beings "lovely in their anonymity", that should bring her own beautiful name back from critical oblivion.

Lord and martyr

Anthony Julius

The life of Thomas More
by Peter Ackroyd
Chatto & Windus 512pp £20

THOMAS MORE began his adult life as a lawyer; the circumstances of his death made him a saint. He was knighted for his judicial services, canonised for his service to the Catholic Church. Sir Thomas became Saint Thomas. He had, indeed, an extraordinary secular career before finding his vocation as a martyr to his faith. He was the last Catholic intellectual of pre-Reformation England, and one of the first Catholic victims of the newly emergent Protestant order. But throughout, as Ackroyd insists, he remained a lawyer. "He embodied law all his life, and he died for it." He was thus not only a Catholic martyr; he was also, in a certain sense, a lawyer-martyr too.

Ackroyd tells More's story with imaginative sympathy and impeccable scholarship. When one finishes the book, one has the sense that not only does Ackroyd know all the available facts about More and his milieu, he knows More himself. He has become inward with his subject.

A lawyer's son, educated at Oxford and Lincoln's Inn, More practised law in London, handling commercial disputes for the prosperous traders of the city. He soon combined this lucrative practice with increasingly demanding and prestigious judicial posts. He became under-sheriff of London; he was appointed to the Star Chamber; he was Speaker of the 1523 Parliament; he became a judge, at first hearing "poor men's suits"; and then, the crowning appointment, Lord Chancellor, taking over from his patron Cardinal Wolsey. Ackroyd quotes him complaining to Erasmus that he was "being diverted from all learning by legal disputes". More makes a similar remark in his preface to Utopia.

He was also a man of letters, a leading humanist with a European reputation, a friend of Erasmus and a scholar of distinction. He wrote poetry (much of it humorous), he was a formidable controversialist, and he was also, of course, the author of Utopia. It is one of the most sophisticated instances of its genre – the imagining of fictional worlds for purposes of comparison with our own – and keeps readers guessing about the extent of its irony.

Though he was throughout his life a man of exceptional (and indeed self-mortifying) piety, More's career as a saint started with his persecution of heretics and his polemics against Luther. He burnt, and vilified, with enthusiasm. His attacks on Luther were remarkably intemperate, even by the standards of his time. In their coprophilic vulgarity they were rivalled only by Luther's own excremental execrations. By contrast, however, his break with Henry VIII was slow, circumspect, and accompanied by endless civilities (on his side, at least).

Like the best martyrs, More did not seek out martyrdom. He resigned as Lord Chancellor only when he could not do otherwise, (punning "Lord Chancellor More is Chancellor no more"). He avoided confrontation with Henry until confrontation became unavoidable. He evaded persecution without wriggling; martyrdom had no glamour for him. He retained his mordant humour when awaiting execution. When a barber was sent to cut his beard and hair, he turned the man away, remarking: "The King has taken out a suit on my head and until the matter is resolved I shall spend no further cost upon it." There was one small mercy at the end when the sentence of disembowelment was commuted to beheading. On the scaffold, he protested (in the words of a contemporary account) that he "died the King's good servant, but God's first".



Sir Thomas More by Holbein. Martyrdom had no glamour for him

This is a wonderful book. It is the latest instalment in Ackroyd's multi-volume project of writing the cultural history of London. It exercises judgments without being censorious. It departs from Robert Bolt version of More's life in certain respects, but affirms it in others. (It is altogether, however, a profounder account than the one offered in A Man For All Seasons.) The contrast Ackroyd draws between Luther and More is penetrating and [illegible] me, at least) convincing. While the former, Ackroyd observes, spoke of judgment "according to love . . . without any law books", the latter insisted upon "the identity of Church and Law". While More obeyed and maintained all the precepts of the law, Luther wished to expel law altogether from the spiritual life.

The received — though misconceived — view of the man is that he put his principles above personal ambition. An alternative view, one promoted by Bolt's play, represents More as an early civil disobedient, putting his conscience before his duty to obey the law. This too is misconceived. As Ackroyd points out, "conscience was not for More an individual matter", but derived instead from "the laws of God and of reason".

Ackroyd thus tells a much more intriguing story than other versions currently available of More's conflict with Henry VIII. His choice was not between principle and ambition, or personal belief and the duty of civil obedience, but between two principles, two kinds of law-abidingness, to each one of which he adhered with great conviction. The first was fidelity to his Church, the second, fidelity to his monarch. His career was a celebration of the compatibility of these two fidelities, while his martyrdom entailed an agonised, protracted recognition of the growing divergence of the one from the other. In the end, he had to choose, but he resisted right up to his trial the need to make that choice. This is the More celebrated by Ackroyd in his masterly new biography. It must be a candidate for book of the year.

Shortlist for children's fiction prize

Julia Eccleshare, the Guardian children's books editor, reviews this year's contenders

Fire, Bed and Bone, by Henrietta Branford (Walker Books, £8.99hbk, £3.99pbk, 11+)

THE exceptional narrative voice of Fire, Bed And Bone comes from the old hunting dog that tells this deeply moving story set in the Middle Ages. The old dog wants nothing more than the fire, bed and bone of the title, but the world around it is too troubled for such a simple existence. Set in the 1320s, social change is sweeping the country. The peasants hear rumours of the rebellions of John Ball and Wat Tyler and they, too, are swept up in revolt against their landowners and masters. Henrietta Branford tells the history of the time with passion and accuracy. In amongst it she weaves a story of humans and dogs that encompasses a vast range of emotions including life, death and rebirth.

The Track of the Wind, by Jamila Gavin (Mammoth, £4.99, 11+)

THIS is the third part of a powerful trilogy but it stands surely on its own. Set in 1951, it tells of both the personal and the political upheaval of the years that led up to the partition of India. Marvinder and Jaspal return to India after the war years spent in England. For them, adapting to the expectations of their father is almost unendurable. They are torn between their English and their Indian selves. While Marvinder ultimately accepts the Indian way of life and settles for the arranged marriage that her father demands, Jaspal joins the fight for Sikh independence, becoming part of a spiritual but violent community. Jamila Gavin describes this vital period of Indian history through the eyes of characters, who can both observe and be absorbed in it. Her sense of place and the flow of her storyline are powerful.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, by J A Rowling (Bloomsbury, £4.99, 10+)

INVENTIVE, funny and exciting, Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone is an outstanding first novel. J K Rowling has created a whole new world of wizardry and sorcery that has just enough magic to make it original and just enough reality to make it wholly plausible. Harry Potter is a hapless orphan living with his bad-tempered aunt and uncle. When a letter arrives addressed to him in his Cupboard Under the Stairs his whole life begins to change.

Off to Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry he begins a new life learning the skills of Quidditch, the importance of the cards in the packs of Chocolate Frogs and a great deal about appearing, disappearing and flying. Excellently plotted, this sparkles with quirky ideas and good jokes.

Secret Songs, by Jane Stemp (Hodder Children's Books, £3.99, 11+)

CERI'S life is full of conflicts, posing choices that she finds hard to make. On a holiday in Scotland she finds herself torn between her mother, her father (who appears on an unexpected visit) and her half-sister Ruth. Each offers something to Ceri, but it is only part of the whole. Partly as protection, Ceri uses her deafness to cut herself off from all of these, finding a deep peace in her own imagination and particular level of hearing. Her isolation also puts her closely in touch with her sister's boyfriend, Euan, who moves as freely in the water as on land. Ceri observes his freedom and envies it but, in the end, she recognises that she has important choices to make. Jane Stemp describes adolescent isolation sensitively and realistically, blending many storylines into an absorbing whole.

The winner, who receives a prize of £1,500, will be announced next month

Ghost on the Big Dipper

Linda Grant

Now and Then: A Memoir: from Coney Island to Here
by Joseph Heller
Simon and Schuster 260pp £16.99

THIS is an affectionate memoir of the old neighbourhood by its most famous export, Joseph Heller. The place is Jewish Coney Island before the war. You can taste the ice cream, brought back from the drug store soda fountain, and discern, with Heller, that a flavour called Golden Glow was the best. The relative values of boiled or grilled hot dogs are discussed.

For 25 cents at the amusement park you could buy a circular pink ticket that you wore round your neck so you didn't lose it, and it entitled you to 25 attractions. Joey Heller and his cronies hung round the exit and politely asked the best-dressed adults if they could have the remainder of their tickets, for, inexplicably, these elderly folk rarely wanted to go on anything but the carousel "created originally for some German king by a master bridge-builder in Leipzig — on which they could smoothly circle for several minutes seated on the benches in one of the ornate gondolas". Like eating a surfeit of ice-cream, Heller found that with "enough tickets to go on any ride as many times as we wanted . . . we soon didn't want to go on any."

Heller's Coney Island is an immigrant Jewish neighbourhood. Like many immigrant families, the past was murky, with factual details readily fabricated to suit the necessity. His father came from Russia with two children, Sylvia, seven years older than Heller, and Eli, seven years older than her. It wasn't until he was well into his teens that Heller realised that they were the son and daughter of his father's late first wife. About this man, who died when Heller was five, he had no interest, for 30 years not asking the cause of death. No one talked about anything deeply felt.

A small portion of this book deals with his time in the air force, and a few sops are thrown to Catch-22 addicts, designating the originals of the characters. Then it's back to Coney Island.

For this is an old man's book, with an old man's memory and an old man's humour.

Heller in old age is a contented man. He is one of a group of great American novelists — Bellow, Roth, Mailer — who, having stopped being young men in a hurry and middle-aged men with bad marriages, are depicting the decline into decrepitude of their own generation. His old pal Mario Puzo's legs are troubling him. Other friends from Coney Island days are getting hard of hearing. Catch-22 cultists will find little of the edgy humour they will be expecting. Heller's subject is the ghost on the Big Dipper: his long-dead father and his long-dead boyhood self.

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A history of hare loss

Mark Cocker



ILLUSTRATION: ANN HOBDAY

ALTHOUGH it was about the same colour as the surrounding earth, it was the one clod in the whole field that seemed to lack the glinting, plough-cut, clay edge of its neighbours. And binoculars soon revealed other peculiarities — a long muzzle drawn into the soft fur of the chest, a tawny iris narrowed to an intense slit and those fantastic black-tipped ears smoothed down along almost its entire back. At the rear, the hard knotted bulge of its haunches suggested the compressed power of two tightly coiled springs.

Then, with a sudden jolt of electricity, the springs burst open and those ridiculously long legs catapulted this mad March hare into an awkward and unrhythmically jinking canter. Later, far across the other side of the field, it lolloped to a halt and stretched the upper body and head skywards while its nostrils flared open as if the creature were sampling the delicate chemistry of an awakening earth.

The brown hare's spring rituals are now so closely interwoven with our perception and celebration of springtime as a whole that it's hard to believe the species is neither native to Britain nor was it viewed favourably by our ancestors.

While proto-hares and their descendants have been present across Eurasia for 60 million years, but the brown hare was absent from the British Isles until the Romans introduced it. They bred rabbits and hares for the table and it seems of a piece with our notions of classical decadence that they considered the laurices — the roasted embryos of both species — a rare culinary delicacy. Unlike the rabbit, which had to wait for the Normans to unleash its own conquest of Britain, the hare escaped from the Romans' lepararia and has been at large ever since.

Yet the creature's wild spring antics were the source of a later association with madness and melancholy, while a superstition that witches could assume the hare's appearance led to its evil reputation. One fragment of medieval lore that survived until the last century was a belief that if a hare crossed a man's path it was a sign of misfortune.

Now, however, it seems that these roles have reversed. Recent changes in Britain's man-made landscape — a loss of hedgerows and woodland, the intense use of agrochemicals, increased production of silage and higher stocking densities — are background factors in a massive slump in hare numbers. A survey conducted in the early nineties suggested a population of about 800,000, which represents a decline of 80 per cent since the turn of the century. In large parts of Wales and western England hares are absent, while East Anglia, representing just one-twentieth of the land surface, holds one-in-five of all British hares.

But it's a measure of the inextricable link between humans and the hares' fortunes that they often do best in areas where they are most frequently hunted. Despite the heavy toll taken by shooting and the manifest brutality of hare-coursing — where the pace of Britain's fastest mammal is pitted against the greater stamina of two greyhounds — their love for the sport ensures that hunters and landowners create the conditions most suitable for their favourite quarry.

An even more perverse example of this strange inter-relationship between hunter and hare arises in Argentina. In the 19th century colonists introduced hares for sport, but the animals adapted so well to the pampas that by the 1970s Argentines were harvesting between five and 10 million annually without reducing overall numbers. In fact, European hunters now supplement their own dwindling hare populations at home with animals imported from South America.

Chess Leonard Barden

GOOD general books on improving your chess are rare these days compared with the flood of titles on specialist openings. It is far easier to transfer variations from a database to the printed page than attempt to verbalise concepts that the average expert expresses to himself in terms of specific moves or shorthand ideas.

Secrets Of Practical Chess by John Nunn (Gambit) and Improve Your Chess Now by Jonathan Tisdall (Cadogan), both £14.99, have appeared almost simultaneously.

Nunn is an England Olympiad gold medallist and a highly regarded writer, Tisdall a Norwegian-American GM who reported world title matches for Reuters. The professional touch shows; both books are clear, reader-friendly and practical. I'm sure I would have done better as a player with the benefit of Nunn's advice on avoiding time pressure and Tisdall's pages on the subtleties of the Queen's Gambit minority attack.

Tisdall shows how strong players analyse. He also provides pithy advice and pattern-recognition tests to improve vision and calculation, and has chapters on defending poor positions and on typical strategies. Nunn is especially good on openings and on taking a critical approach to books and articles of the "Win with . . ." variety.

There are some weaknesses. Nunn gets carried away into excessively long analyses, while his starred boards, which attempt to explain queen and pawn v queen, look too complicated.

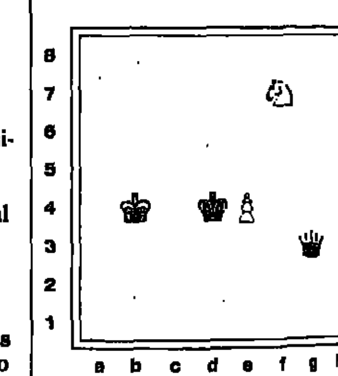
His conclusion is that the c pawn is the best to have if you want to win, but it isn't stated that the f pawn is as good. Tisdall is sidetracked into abstract philosophical discussions, and I'm dubious whether a player with a low chess visual ability can improve it much.

Better, surely, to provide specific tests of sight of the board such as the well-known de Groot test, where world champion Euwe recalled much more of a strange position after a few seconds than did local experts. And the Czech and Levitt tests, which involve hopping a knight around the board as fast as possible while dodging a static queen or pawns, are useful tests of natural ability.

Most of what Nunn and Tisdall write is very helpful, and these two books may improve your play markedly if you are anywhere from club player up to expert. It's a pity that the authors didn't get together to create a joint work — that could have been a modern classic.

Here's a Tisdall imagination test. Try to visualise the entire game, then decide what happened at the end. (Sokolov v Savko, Latvia 1994): 1 c4 Nf6 2 Nc3 e5 3 g3 d5 4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 Bg2 Nb6 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 0-0 Be7 8 a3 0-0 9 b4 Be6 10 d3 a5 11 b5 Nd4 12 Rb1 f6 13 Nd2 Nd5.

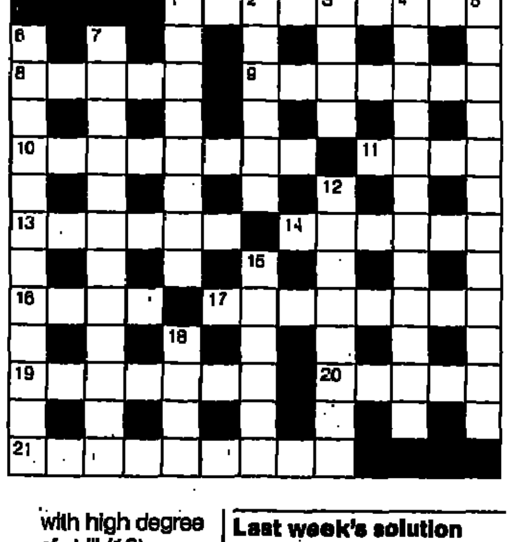
No 2515



White mates in four moves, against any defence (R Willmers 1859). Just a single line of play, but well hidden.

No 2514: 1 Nf3 Nc6 2 Ne5 Nd4 3 Nc6 Rb8 4 Nxb8 Nxe2 5 Nc6 Nd4 6 Ne6 Nc6 7 Nf3 Nb8 8 Ng1. *Sokolov v Savko:* 1 Bxd5! Bxd5 2 e3 Nf5/e6 3 e4 wins a piece.

Quick crossword no. 410



Across

1 One taking the blame for others (9)
8 Throng (5)
9 Frenzied (7)
10 Possessed — haunted (8)
11 Lightning! — Run! (4)
13 Gain (6)
14 Spin a coin (4,2)
16 Inactive (4)
17 Witty conversation (8)
19 Hide — the port (7)
20 Use divining rod (5)
21 Finding out — Scott's ship (9)

Down

1 Cruelly inflicting pain (8)
2 Sauntered (6)
3 Nobleman (4)
4 Unimportant municipality (3-5,4)
5 Dismantle (4,2,6)
6 Performed — with high degree of skill (12)
7 Upper chamber of Parliament (6,2,5)
12 Craven (8)
15 Extent — of one's education? (6)
18 Unaccompanied (4)

Last week's solution

Bridge Zia Mahmood

THE Forbo Krommenie tournament in the Netherlands attracts a strong field from all over the world. It lasts two days. On the first, the field of 80 teams is divided into 10 sections, who each play a qualifying round to decide which 16 will contest the main final the following day. If you don't make this élite group, you play in a consolation final. This ensures that, on the second day, you're competing with players of your own standard.

They are keen on their bridge and keen on their food in the Netherlands, so play starts at 10am and continues till 6pm. This is because you need the whole evening free to do justice to a *rijstafel*, an enormous collection of exotic dishes that is the legacy to the Dutch of its former colonies in East Asia.

To give you some idea of the strength of the field this year, the French World and Olympic champions did not make the main final. Neither did the Swedish national team. The British squad also fell by the wayside. The crucial match in the final was between Germany and the United States, and it was settled by an inspirational performance from the German South player on the deal below. Pick up his cards and see if you can do as well. East is the dealer, and your hand is:

♠Q 10 7 6 ♥10 8 3 ♦Q 8 6 3 ♣K 7

Paul Soloway, on your right, opens the bidding with a pre-emptive three clubs. You pass, of course, as does Bobby Goldman, on your left. Your partner re-opens the bidding with a takeout double. What call do you make?

I confess that I would have chosen three spades, as did Mike Passell for the US at the other table. But Dr Wladow for Germany selected 3NT, a courageous effort with so weak a hand and so tenuous a club guard. His partner had a very good hand, but his problems were just beginning. Cover the East-West cards in the diagram and decide how you would plan the play on the lead of ace and another club (see table above).

Winning the second round of clubs with the king, Dr Wladow played a small diamond to the ace! When the king of diamonds fell, he wrapped up an enormous number of tricks at high speed.

Now, if you were East and your opponent did that to you, you would hold your cards rather closer to your chest. But Soloway appreciated that Wladow had made the correct play. If West had turned up with the king of diamonds, declarer would still have had eight top tricks with excellent chances of a ninth via the heart finesse, or perhaps a major suit endplay on West. But if East had the king of diamonds South must avoid losing a trick to that card, which could only be achieved in the actual position.

Although Soloway and Goldman were aware that this deal would cost them the match, they were the first to congratulate South on his bold bidding and wonderful play.

West	North	East	South
	♠ A 2		
	♥ A K J 6		
	♦ A J 9 7 2		
	♣ 6 2		
♠ K J 5 3		♠ 9 8 4	
♥ Q 9 7 4		♥ 5 2	
♦ 10 5 4		♦ K	
♣ A 5		♣ Q J 10 9 8 4 3	
			♠ Q 10 7 6
			♥ 10 8 3
			♦ Q 8 6 3
			♣ K 7

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Cricket Fifth Test: West Indies v England

Series hopes washed away

Mike Selvey in Bridgetown

MONTHS of drought have caused severe water shortage in Barbados, but the weather broke on Monday and brought a soggy end to the fifth Test and to England's hopes of winning the match and going on with the series squared at 2-2. Whatever happens in Antigua now, West Indies have retained the Wisden Trophy.

The entire morning session was lost and all but 18 overs of the afternoon, and the match was finally abandoned as a draw. By then West Indies had taken their second-innings score from 71 to 112 for the loss of Clayton Lambert for 29 and Philo Wallace for 61, a wicket apiece falling to Angus Fraser and Andy Caddick.

A record breaking sixth-wicket partnership of 205 between Mark Ramprakash and Graham Thorpe in England's first innings had put the visitors in a strong position to win the match. Ramprakash scored 154 in nine hours — his first Test century. Thorpe's 103 was the sixth century of his 48-match career.

After West Indies fell for 262 in their first innings, a century opening stand with — glory be — a half-century from Mike Atherton and some positive batting from Stewart (48), Mark Butcher (26), Nasser Hussein (46 not out) and Graham Thorpe (36 not out) had put England in control. Atherton declared with 19 overs and the final day remaining in which to bowl the hosts out.

Although West Indies had got off to a flier last Sunday evening, scoring 71 without loss as Wallace and Lambert attacked England's new-ball attack with relish, the chances of them reaching 375 — 27 more than their highest winning fourth-innings total — were already slim in any case with evidence that the pitch, bone-dry from the effects of sun, wind and drought, was going to play awkwardly. But despite West Indies' proven capacity to fold when it is least expected, time and the weather denied England a win.

Water torture . . . rain forced a draw on the final day REBECCA NADEN

England: 403 and 233 for 3 dec
West Indies: 262 and 112 for 2
Match drawn

Rugby Union Richmond 30 Newcastle 17

Quinnell departure acts as a spur for Richmond

Robert Kitson

AT LEAST now we know the secret of how to beat Newcastle in Premiership One: make sure your star Welsh forward is sent off with an hour to play, then sit back and let 14 men do the job. Chopping off one part of the Quinnell family, as the Falcons discovered, simply encourages a bigger, stronger version to materialise in his place.

With two months to go Newcastle's Rob Andrew will not relish any Kevin Keegan-type comparisons in the Premiership run-in. Even so, he will recall his side's doomed quest for a 13th straight league win with a shudder he scarcely envisaged when Scott Quinnell was banished with 22 minutes gone for kneeing Paul "Tank" Van Zandvliet in the head.

Richmond already led 14-0 with two converted tries from Jason Wright and Andy Moore, both after kickable penalty attempts had been spurned in favour of the short punt to touch to gain attacking line-outs. But Newcastle have not become a power in the land by ignoring convenient drive-through opportunities.

They reckoned, however, without the magnificent seven home forwards who remained, whipped on by Ben Clarke and Craig Quinnell, once the filial red mist had settled. It was Craig Quinnell who burst through at least three tacklers in first-half injury-time to put his side 22-3 ahead, and when Dominic Chapman skipped over for a fourth try on the hour the margin was an untouchable 27 points, despite two Newcastle tries in the final 10 minutes.

It all did little for Dean Ryan's prospects of an international recall in front of Clive Woodward and Lawrence Dallaglio — who monitored a bristling encounter in which only five of the 20 starting internationals were English — and also cast Wales's selection policy in a doubtful light as the English-based Quinnells are not included in the Welsh squad to face Ireland on Saturday.

The departure of Inga Tuigamala and Tony Underwood with knee injuries, a mid-week slog against Sale and some tired Scottish bodies contributed to Newcastle's woes, and Andrew can only hope his team's worst display of the season stirs something within a few weary minds.

Elsewhere, leaders Saracens were beaten 38-15 by Gloucester; Bath saw off Leicester 16-5; London Irish overcame Wasps 38-19; Northampton triumphed over Bristol 35-12; and Sale defeated Harlequins 23-13.

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Ticket policy is checked

FRANCE'S handling of ticket sales for the World Cup came under attack from the European Commission, which issued an order that the outstanding tickets for the competition be made available outside the host country. It was accompanied by a threat that big fines could be imposed if the order was not obeyed. France has offered to make 50,000 of the 160,772 remaining tickets available to the 31 other national associations in the World Cup and put the rest on the open market.

Meanwhile England's hopes of staging the World Cup in 2006 received a big boost from the Fifa president, Joao Havelange, who expressed the desire that England should be the venue for the competition. "By the year 2006 it will have been 40 years since England hosted the tournament," he said after talks with Tony Blair in Downing Street.

"The decision will be made by the Fifa executive in June 2000. It is my wish that on that day it will be decided that the World Cup 2006 will indeed take place here in England."

ARSENAL have offered $200 million to buy Wembley Stadium and turn it into their new home. The English Sports Council is already negotiating to buy Wembley to redevelop it as a new national stadium, vital for attracting big events such as the World Cup and the Olympics. Arsenal's offer was considered at a Wembley board meeting. A Wembley spokesman said: "We are continuing discussions with all parties at this stage."

NEWCASTLE UNITED signed the Greek international defender Nicos Dabizas for around $3.3 million. The arrival of the 24-year-old at St James' Park from Olympiakos takes Kenny Dalglish's spending to nearly $20 million this year. His latest acquisitions include Gary Speed and Andreas Andersson.

AMERICAN golfer Mark Calcavechia held on to his overnight lead last Sunday to win the Honda Classic at Coral Springs, Florida, by three shots from Fiji's Vijay Singh. Colin Montgomerie of Scotland, fourth last year, finished third.

At Agadir, Australia's Stephen Leaney recorded a runaway victory by eight strokes in the Moroccan Open. He shot a final round 67 for a 72-hole aggregate of 271 — the only player in the field to break 70 in all four rounds. Robert Karlsson, who shot 71 in the final round, was runner-up on 279 and his fellow Swede Matthias Gronberg (74) third on 282.

SCOTLAND'S Peter Nicol fought back to defeat England squash captain Chris Walker and take the Renault Austrian Open title at Linz. For the third consecutive match, top seed Nicol lost the first game. But the 24-year-old left-hander then took the next three games to seal a 11-15, 15-9, 15-10, 15-12 victory, which further strengthens his status as the World No 1.

CRAWFORD ASHLEY easily retained his British light-heavyweight crown when he stopped Monty Wright in less than two rounds in London.

Football results

FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP: Aston Villa 3, Crystal Palace 1; Barnsley 4, Southampton 3; Bolton Wanderers 3, Sheff Wed 2; Derby County 0, Leeds 5; Everton 1, Blackburn Rovers 0; Manchester Utd 0, Arsenal 1; Newcastle Utd 0, Coventry 0; Tottenham Hotspur 3, Liverpool 3; West Ham Utd 2, Chelsea 1; Wimbledon 2, Leicester City 1.
Leading positions: 1, Man Utd (played 31-points 60); 2, Arsenal (28-54); 3, Liverpool (30-51).

NATIONWIDE LEAGUE:
Division One: Bradford 0, Birminghm 0; Charlton 1, Sunderland 1; Huddersfld 3, Tranmere 0; Norwich 1, WBA 1; Nottm For 3, Bury 0; Oxford 5, Stoke 1; Portsmth 0, Middlesbro 0; Port Vale 2, Man City 1; QPR 1, Swindon 2; Sheff Utd 4, Reading 0; Stockport 0, Ipswich 1; Wolves 1, Crewe 0.
Leading positions: 1, Nottm Forest (37-74); 2, Middlesbrough (37-72); 3, Sunderland (37-70).

Division Two: Bournemth 0, Wrexham 1; Bristol City 2, Bristol R 0; Burnley 1, Luton 1; Carlisle 1, Brentford 2; Fulham 1, Millwall 2; Gillingham 1, Chesterfld 0; Grimsby 3, Walsall 0; Northmptn 2, Blackpool 0; Preston 3, York 2; Watford 1, Southend 1; Wigan 1, Oldham 0; Wycombe 5, Plymouth 1.
Leading positions: 1, Bristol City (37-72); 2, Watford (37-72); 3, Grimsby (35-61).

Division Three: Barnet 2, Brighton 0; Cambridge 2, Sc'thorpe 2; Cardiff 7, Doncaster 1; Chester 0, Notts Co 1; Colchester 5, Macclesfld 1; Darlington 1, Torquay 2; Exeter 3, Hull 0; Hartlepool 4, Swansea 2; Lincoln 2, Rochdale 0; Rotherham 2, Mansfield 2; Scarboro 2, Orient 0; Shrewsbry 4, Peterboro 1.
Leading positions: 1, Notts County (38-84); 2, Torquay (38-68); 3, Barnet (38-64).

BELL'S SCOTTISH LEAGUE:
Premier Division: Celtic 1, Dundee Utd 1; Dunfrmline 3, Aberdeen 3; Hearts 1, Kilmarnk 1; Motherwell 2, Rangers 1; St Johnstn 1, Hibernian 1.
Leading positions: 1, Celtic (28-59); 2, Hearts (28-57); 3, Rangers (28-54).

First Division: Ayr 0, Airdrie 2; Dundee 2, Morton 0; Falkirk 0, Raith 1; Partick 1, St Mirren 2; Stirling A 0, Hamilton 1.
Leading positions: 1, Dundee (28-59); 2, Falkirk (28-48); 3, Raith (27-46).

Second Division: Clydebank 0, Livingston 2; Clyde 1, Inverness CT 6; East Fife 0, Stranraer 3; Forfar 0, Stenhsmr 1; Queen Sth 1, Brechin 1.
Leading positions: 1, Clydebank (27-49); 2, Livingston (26-44); 3, Stranraer (28-40).

Third Division: Albion 0, Cowdnbth 1; Arbroath 3, Alloa 0; E Stirling 1, Berwick 1; Queens Pk 0, Dumbarton 2; Ross Co 2, Montrose 1.
Leading positions: 1, Alloa (27-53); 2, Arbroath (27-48); 3, Ross County (26-46).

Rugby League Challenge Cup quarter-finals

Comeback Kid Betts against the odds

Andy Wilson

AS FAIRYTALES go, this one was almost too corny. Wigan, denied the Challenge Cup for the past two seasons by St Helens, marked the first game of the new regime headed by Dave Whelan with a defeat of the old enemy 22-10 at a packed Central Park, with the decisive try being scored by Denis Betts in his first appearance since returning home from three years with Auckland Warriors.

Betts had endured some extremely hard times in New Zealand, where he was picked out for blame, along with the coach John Monie, for Auckland's failures in the Australasian competition, although many of his problems arose when the startling size of his contract became a matter of public knowledge.

He has also had a shoulder reconstructed during the winter and was not planning to play last Sunday. But when Wigan were drawn against Saints he began persuading Monie to bring forward his comeback by two weeks.

"At first he said no chance, but I think I wore him down," said Betts. Three days before the match he was named as a substitute. He entered the encounter after 31 minutes, stood up to the fiercest forward exchanges in the British game and on 74 minutes followed Tony Smith's scampering run to flop over the line.

"I've had a pretty good week," he said with a laugh. Monie, who took Betts to Auckland and back, went further. "It was a great effort. He's come back after six months out, he hadn't had a trial game but he still went the distance, which was never part of the plan."

Monie was thoroughly impressed with his first real test as a Super League coach. "There was a touch of the Australian game in that first half," he explained. "It was a real arm-wrestle."

The pattern was broken in thrilling style by St Helens on 16 minutes when Anthony Sullivan, in possibly the most devastating performance of his career, came off his left wing to dummy-half and made a brilliant break on the right before feeding his fellow wing Chris Smith, who just had the pace to hold off Kris Radlinski.

Wigan's reply, when they finally managed to pierce Saints' superbly organised defence, was also a tale of two wingers. Mark Bell's intelligent kick secured an extra set of tackles, from which Danny Moore took Andy Farrell's long pass to crash over. Moore also set up Wigan's second try after the interval with a pass that allowed Jason Robinson to sprint 70 metres for a score that clinched his Man of the Match award.

But Saints came again when Moore lost the ball in his own quarter, after which Bobbie Goulding and Paul Newlove linked perfectly to give Sullivan a richly deserved try.

Goulding's conversion attempt hit the bar but Saints were still in there fighting, even after Simon Haughton powered through Sean Long's tackle from close range, until Betts rounded off his fairytale week.

In the other quarter-finals, Salford Reds beat Hull Sharks 41-10; Sheffield Eagles disposed of Castleford Tigers 32-22; and London Broncos defeated Hull KR 46-18.